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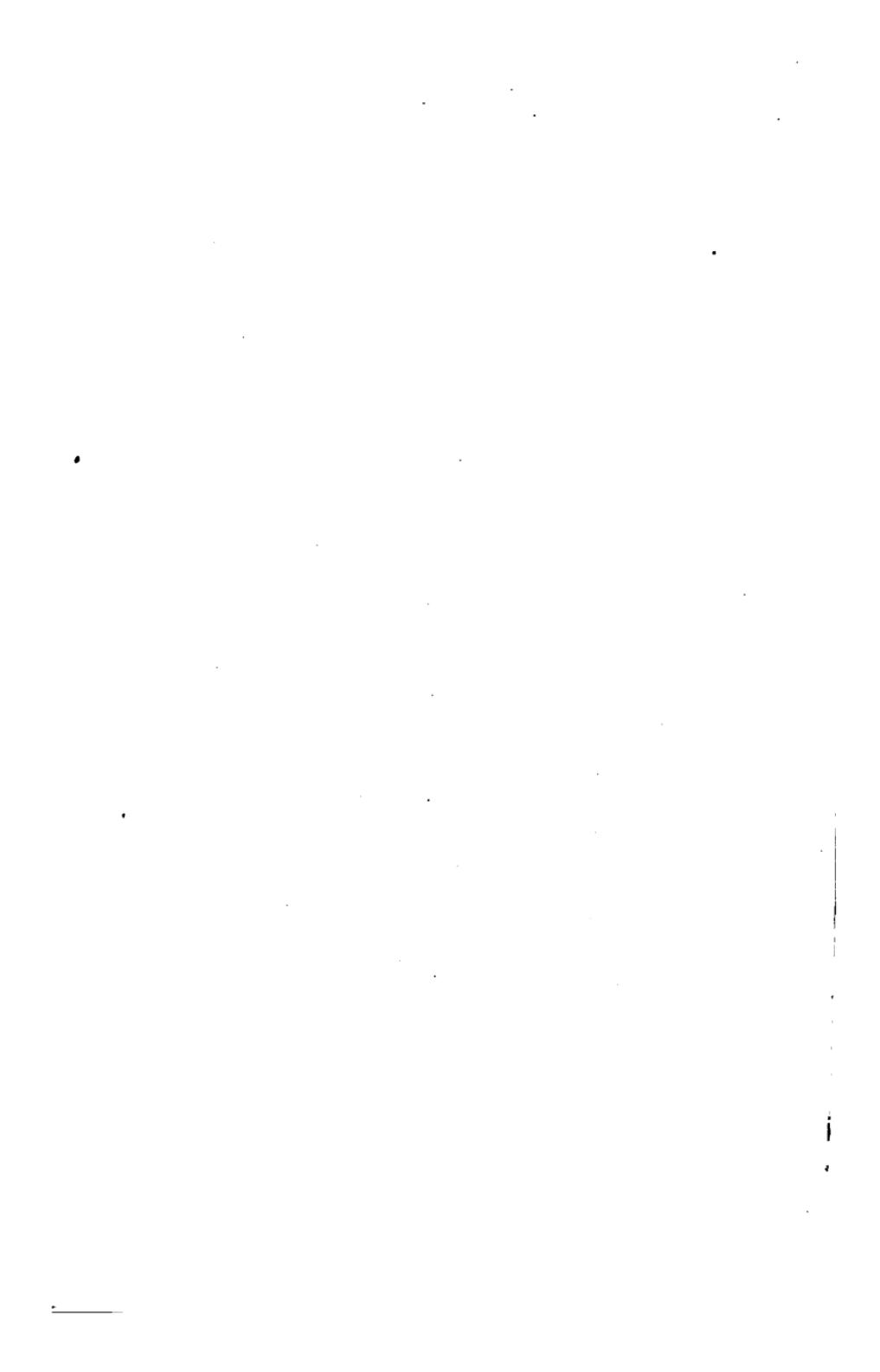
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L Y D I A:

A W O M A N ' S B O O K.

BY

MRS. NEWTON CROSLAND,
AUTHOR OF "PARTNERS FOR LIFE," "TOIL AND TRIAL,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

"Believing for us both,
What was the truth for only one.

• • •
What eyes the future view aright
Unless by tears anointed?"

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

LONDON :
R. GROOMBRIDGE & SONS.

M.DCCC.LII.

249. J. 414.

LONDON,
PRINTED BY J. WERTHEIMER AND CO.
FINSBURY CIRCUS.

Dedication.

TO

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

DEAR MISS MITFORD,

Whatever measure of sympathy or approval this little book may meet, your friendly and cordial permission for me to unite your name with it must ever remain to me a gratifying recollection.

If the story of "Lydia" should be recognised by even a few readers as a "Woman's Book," then will there seem some fitness in thus inscribing it to so great an ornament of

our sex — to one associated, in the minds of thousands, with all that is earnest and healthful in genius, and true and natural in woman.

Accept then, dear Miss Mitford, this slight token of respect, admiration, and regard, from

Yours affectionately,

CAMILLA CROSLAND.

BLACKHEATH,

May 1st, 1852.

PREFACE.

IN offering this little work to the consideration of my readers, I trust that the title will not be considered an ambitious one. It is simply meant to indicate that the phases of Life which I have endeavoured to depict are regarded from the Woman's point of view; and that in the execution of my plan, I have chiefly depended upon the approval and sympathy of my own sex.

Few persons now-a-days consider that there is to be provided for women a literature different from that offered to men; but probably

as long as the world lasts, each sex will have its separate sphere of trials and temptations, so that many of the lessons of life must be more appropriate to the one than the other.

Some critics may smile at a few of the attributes of my hero; but I cannot refrain from believing that domestic happiness would be infinitely increased, if the virtues I have attempted to delineate in him were more frequently aimed at and applauded.

It is, however, indeed a poor fable which requires its moral to be expounded; and if this story does not reveal its purpose on perusal, the fault must be mine.

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LYDIA:
A WOMAN'S BOOK.

CHAP. I.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

“LYDIA is a good girl; and quite a clever careful nurse to her little brother.”

The words were spoken in a gentle voice, yet with the tremulous intonation of an invalid; and, as Mrs. Bowring smoothed down the dark shining curls of her young step-daughter, there was that charm in her affectionate caressing manner, which usually reaches the heart—when there is a heart to be reached—more swiftly and more surely than the kindest speech. The praise and the manner were not without effect; they half reconciled the little girl to the duty which was not exactly a labour of love. She

had been required to watch for a few minutes beside a sleeping infant. Lydia was six years of age; Mark, the boy in the cradle, the only child of Mr. Bowring's second wife, was less than twelve-months old.

I must describe that old-fashioned nursery; a large room, in a rambling old-fashioned country house. Though spacious, it was so low, that a tall person might readily touch the ceiling; the walls were primly panelled with some dark-grained wood, and partially covered, not adorned, with bad engravings, monstrous in their ugliness. I remember one, a coloured print, representing the incongruity of Arcadian shepherds, Roman warriors, and patched and powdered ladies; the chief figure being attired in a scarlet cloak, which, streaming in the wind, suggested the idea of gusty weather, especially as the furbelows of a fine lady floated in the opposite direction. Another, set in a black frame, depicted George the Third reviewing the yeomanry of the shire, and was as

ungainly a production as bad drawing, hideous costume, and matter of fact treatment could make it. Then there were pieces of needle-work framed and glazed, the handiwork of Mr. Bowring's mother and maiden aunts. One, satin stitch on what had been white silk, portrayed a female figure strewing flowers upon a grave; perhaps the tomb was emblematic of time lost and killed in such useless occupation. At any rate, the soiled and faded silks had no better lesson to teach. But enough of the series, which bore a strong family likeness to each other. Yet I would suggest, that it is a mistake to hang up this description of refuse in a nursery. Beauty and Grace have a holier influence than their despisers believe, and they flee away, like good angels rebuked, from the haunts of their offensive opposites.

The old nursery was lighted by two latticed windows which opened much nearer to the ceiling than to the floor; but it was the twilight of a winter afternoon when Lydia

watched by her brother's cot, and the bright fire shining through the wires of the high fender was a more cheerful object than the leafless shivering trees to be seen from the window, or the bare bleak hills beyond them.

Mrs. Bowring was perhaps five or six and twenty at the time of which I write; but a stranger might easily have taken her for a girl in her teens. Her small, slight figure naturally suggested the comparison to a sylph; and, alas! her dazzling complexion owed not a little of its fatal beauty to our climate's most insidious disease. Her beautiful hair, of a golden brown, was nearly hidden by a close cap of muslin and lace, and she wore a white morning wrapper, beneath the large soft scarlet cashmere which enveloped her. She had transgressed medical orders, by leaving the couch of her dressing-room that bleak winter's day, even though she traversed but a single flight of stairs.

“ I will stay with baby-brother until

nurse comes back," continued Mrs. Bowring, after praising Lydia's attention; "so you may run away to see aunt Ridley if you like; I dare say you know she has arrived."

"Yes, mamma," replied Lydia; "I know, because nurse was sent for to wait upon her; and nurse told me to stay with little brother till she came back."

"It was very right and thoughtful of Morris to do so; but now that I am here, my love, you can go if you like; or, if you prefer staying, play quietly, that is all."

It seemed that the little girl had no desire to leave the nursery; for she seated herself on a low stool, near the tall fender, and by the flickering fire-light set herself diligently to dress a doll. But the young mother remained in the far away corner, beside little Mark's cot, and leaning one arm on the side rail, gazed on the little healthy cherub face as if she sought to trace therein a life's history. Like Tennyson's "Lady Psyche," she longed "to

satisfy her soul with kissing it;" but no: her infant's peaceful rest was dearer to her than her own mother-wish; and so she gazed on in rapt silence, save that one or two large tears splashed like rain drops on the boy's pillow. But they were tears unseen by fellow mortals; tears that leave not behind the vulgar traces of weeping: so that had the little maiden, absorbed in her doll-dressing, looked up for a moment, the most she could have observed would have been the soft lustre of her step-mother's deep blue eyes.

Hardly ten minutes elapsed before the nurse returned: and now Ann Morris deserves a few words of introduction. She was between thirty and forty years of age, and had been nurse to little Lydia in the lifetime of the first Mrs. Bowring. Possibly, when startled two years ago by the intelligence that a young bride, a stranger to the house, and a stranger to the family was coming to be mistress, Morris was not devoid of the suspicious

jealousy which seemed in too many quarters to await the new comer ; but though she had a warm heart, and a little of that conservative temper which clings to old habits long after they can be defended, she also possessed the clear good sense which is rarely separated from thorough integrity ; and so, when she perceived that a gentle, yet firm and orderly government, was gradually succeeding to the misrule of the widower's household ; and when she saw, that thoughtful and timely indulgence replaced fitful caprice and frequent license, she conquered all prejudice in favour of the past, and gave in a hearty and affectionate allegiance to her new mistress. Long before the birth of the little boy, Morris had instituted comparisons between the two wives, highly favourable to the second one ; and since Mrs. Bowring's serious illness, her attention and devotion to the invalid had been of that nature which money-wages can neither buy when wanted, nor recompense when conferred.

She gave a start of surprise as she entered the nursery, and saw Mrs. Bowring; and then holding up her finger, she exclaimed "Naughty!" much as she might have done if addressing a child.

"Do not scold me, nurse," said Mrs. Bowring, smiling, "I felt no draught on the staircase, and I have coughed but very slightly all day."

Yet she had scarcely spoken, when a strange distressing breathing preluded a feeble but prolonged cough that made the sufferer place her hands—her thin hands that looked almost as white as the cuff-frills which shrouded them—to her chest, and sink gladly into the easy chair which Morris had drawn near the fire.

"Poor dear — poor dear!" murmured the nurse, hardly conscious that she was thinking aloud, and then she added with excusable freedom —

"The sooner, ma'am, you go back to your dressing-room the better. Mrs. Ridley will be

here presently to see the children ; and she 'll talk till she makes your head ache."

Alice Bowring did not dispute this good advice. She rose to follow it, and Morris insisted on lifting the shawl from her shoulders to her head, and then brought it almost over her face, fastening it securely under the chin. All this preparation—nor was it unnecessary—to descend one flight of stairs, in a house warmed by many fires, and the chief passages of which were heated by stoves ! Poor Alice, the young mother, the well-beloved wife, earth has strong sweet ties for thy spirit ; but frail is the thread of life which binds thee here !

" I will see you on to the sofa," continued the nurse, " there—there do not stay to look at the boy again ; I will bring him to you presently, you shall have him all the time they are at dinner."

CHAP. II.

A CHILD'S QUESTION.

I KNOW it is very correct and proper to speak of the “one great human family,” and to consider it as a wide-spread brotherhood. Yet, practically speaking, we are constantly reminded that this extended connexion admits of *very* distant relationship. Nature itself, in the outward visible world, scarcely presents such decided contrasts, as those which are to be found between individuals of man and womankind—between the true and the false—the generous and the selfish—the meek and the haughty—the wise and the foolish. Suggestive of strange contrasts is it to remark, that Alice Bowring and Johanna Ridley were both

Englishwomen and wives and mothers in the same sphere of life—yet different in every personal attribute.

Some little time elapsed before Morris returned to the children; for when she reached Mrs. Bowring's room, she found it necessary to arrange the couch, to make up the fire, and to draw the window-curtains; all which duties properly pertained to an upper housemaid, who, in addition to her ostensible employments, fulfilled the office of lady's-maid. But Morris was an active body ready to put her hand to any-thing; and moreover had latterly seemed even a little jealous of any one but herself waiting on the invalid. It was with quite a different manner she had obeyed Mrs. Ridley's summons to uncord her boxes, understanding perfectly well that this was only a pretence to question her about the family—the children especially.

It was during the nurse's absence, that Mrs. Ridley found her way to the nursery,

opening wide the door to admit her portly person. Portly, for, though neither remarkably tall nor stout, there was a certain air about her which seemed to demand space: she always walked and sat so terribly upright, that she was a visible reproach to the unfortunates who had frailer and less arrowy spines. Though scarcely more than thirty, she seemed to have left all traces of her youth far behind; or rather she awakened a sort of vague wonder which made one curious to know how she could have looked when a girl. She had horrible taste in dress; her wiry dark hair was surmounted by a dowdy matronly cap, and she always chose her dresses of those dull brown, or dusty drab shades, which look old when new, and never in any condition present either refreshment or repose to the eye. The lover of beautiful forms and rich colours longed to pull her dresses into shape and fit, and to relieve their colourless mass by some one hue caught pure from the rainbow — Nature's palette

whence she paints the flowers. Not that the lady would have permitted such an operation; for she piqued herself on her strength of mind, and despised every-thing so weakly feminine as care for dress.

Even Mrs. Ridley's eyes had a sickly lustre. They were not black or brown, or blue, or grey, or green; though they had been mistaken for each. Her complexion was sallow—her teeth, though even were not white—her lips were pale: in short, to use an imperfect simile, there was nothing to relieve the monotony of her appearance. There seemed some discord wanting that might be resolved into harmony. And yet so regular were her features that some people considered her handsome. She was the sister of Mr. Bowring's first wife; and now, with her only child, a boy a little older than Lydia, had come to pass the Christmas at Stoneleigh.

"All alone, poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Ridley, as she perceived Lydia, and speaking in

a tone which suggested that there was something very terrible in the circumstance.

“O, mamma and nurse Morris have only just gone away,” replied the little girl; then, as she gathered up her pinafore full of doll’s clothes to rise from the stool, holding her treasures fast with one arm, she raised the other towards Mrs. Ridley’s waist, and lifting her face to be kissed, she continued, “How do you do, aunt; please don’t talk loud, because mamma told me not to wake little brother.”

But Mrs. Ridley did not accept the proffered kiss; she only took the child’s hand, which she held fast; and then, seating herself with considerable dignity in the large chair so recently occupied by Mrs. Bowring, commenced an harangue something to the following effect:—

“Your aunt! Probably your dear aunt you would wish me to believe; but how am I your aunt, if you have still a mamma? I thought Lydia’s sweet mamma was taken to heaven

three years ago—but of course she knows best, and I must be mistaken.”

Lydia made no answer; but she looked on the ground, her cheeks flushed, and had she raised her eyes, it would have been seen that the tears were ready to flow. She tried to extricate her hand, but Mrs. Ridley held it still, as she continued—

“Have you forgotten what I said to you, the last time I was at Stoneleigh?”

“No, aunt,” murmured the child, still without looking up.

“Then why do you persist in calling that person ‘mamma’—and that infant ‘brother.’”

“She tells me to call her ‘mamma,’ ” replied Lydia in a somewhat firmer voice, “and nurse says he is my brother.”

“She; by ‘she’ I suppose you mean Miss Alice Armitage that was. And so, Lydia Bowering, you consider it your duty to obey her, and to believe an ignorant servant, in preference to following the instructions of your aunt—

the only aunt you have in the world—your poor dear mother's only sister."

"But, aunt," sobbed Lydia, now fairly snatching her hand away to stanch the tears; "but, aunt, Papa tells me to call her mamma, and he always calls the baby my brother Mark."

"He does!" ejaculated Mrs. Ridley, raising her hands at this terrible announcement; and then, as a change came over her mind, her temper, or her diplomacy, she caught Lydia in her arms;—crushing almost to destruction the pinafore full of doll's finery—placed the child on her knee, kissed her two or three times, and then, rocking herself and her burthen backwards and forwards, she murmured—

"Poor innocent!—poor orphaned lamb! her own father too! O that her mother could look up from the grave—O that she could!"

Certainly, if the disembodied spirit which was thus evoked, had been permitted to return and to see, and to judge with the clear eyes of the soul, she would have seen nothing in the

life of her child so grievously to lament as her sister's dark influence. Yet as the paroxysm of Mrs. Ridley's grief and displeasure abated, it left, just as she had desired, a debris on the mind of the little Lydia. The impression was vague and yet real; it was a breaking-up of that content, and habit of obedience, and growing regard for Mrs. Bowring, and childish love for her infant brother, which had been establishing themselves during Mrs. Ridley's three months' absence from Stoneleigh. Back there flowed to her young mind the recollection of Mrs. Ridley's former discourse; how Mrs. Bowring was not her mother, though she had taken her mother's name and place; how the baby brother had come to rob her of her father's love, and how when he grew to be a man he would rob her of her fortune.

It is true, the feelings and ideas which Mrs. Ridley sought to instil were—in their deep malignity, with their slender thread of truth on which to string the falsehoods and make

them strong and dangerous — not within the scope of six years old thoroughly and completely to grasp ; but they adapted themselves to the child's mind, taking root where they could, and casting many a seed that was ready to germinate in riper years.

Meanwhile the rocking of the chair, Lydia's sobs, and Mrs. Ridley's ejaculations, had aroused the infant in the cot ; and nurse Morris returned to the room to encounter the unmusical sound of a baby's crying.

“ My blessed one ! my darling ! did it wake and find her gone ! ” exclaimed Morris, indulging in the jargon supposed to be most pleasing to infantile capacity, as she raised the boy in her arms, and quickly quieted him.

“ I have not looked at the baby yet,” said Mrs. Ridley, who composed her face and her manner with wonderful rapidity when the nurse's foot was heard, “ I am afraid it must be a sickly babe ; infants seldom cry when they are well.”

“Sickly, ma’am!—Why he is the picture of health—don’t cry for the week together—does it, the pretty poppet?” tossing him up as she spoke, till his head was certainly in peril of touching the ceiling; “something must have frightened him, or he would not have woke crying. I often think we can’t tell what passes in their little minds. Look at him now, crowing as if he would try to talk, and feeling his feet as if he were running already.”

“O I am very glad; I am sure that it is a healthy child,” said Mrs. Ridley; “but you know, the mother being such an invalid, it would not have been surprising if the child were sickly.”

“Never had a day’s real illness since it was born! had it, the darling?” exclaimed Morris; then observing something which she had not precisely the key to interpret, she continued, addressing the little girl: “Miss Lydia, don’t stare at your aunt in that manner; it is very rude.”

Lydia turned her eyes from Mrs. Ridley, and gazed for a moment at the nurse, and at her infant brother; then, laying her hand on her aunt's knee, she again looked fixedly in Mrs. Ridley's face; but now she spoke her thoughts, and they were—

“Aunt Ridley, are you really glad that little Mark is never ill?”

Mrs. Ridley quailed for a moment beneath that honest inquiring glance; but Lydia was too inexperienced to read the meaning of her change of countenance, while yet the aunt had the hardihood to reply—

“Child, what a question! Of course I am!”

Lydia resumed her low seat; nurse made a great noise and disturbance in stirring the fire, which operation she performed for the purpose of “having a good look” at her visitor, and in a few minutes Mrs. Ridley left the room to visit Mrs. Bowring.

Presently, however, she returned, leading in her little boy, just to say, “How do you do,

cousin Lydia," before a very dirty pair of hands were washed, and a disordered head of hair was brushed into something like neatness.

That evening, nurse Morris permitted Lydia to sit up half an hour longer than usual ; gave her toast instead of bread and butter at tea ; assisted her to dress and undress her doll with patience beautiful to behold ; talked much of her "good mamma" and "sweet little brother," and gave her at least six extra kisses as she laid her in the little white bed that neighboured "baby's cot." The artless question which had perplexed Mrs. Ridley, opened a new vein of thought in the mind of nurse Morris.

CHAP. III.

A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN OF FIVE AND TWENTY
YEARS AGO.—THE MOTHER'S ASPIRATIONS.

MR. BOWRING belonged to a class of men much more common a quarter of a century ago than they are at present. They had their uses too, and rendered more solid and important services to the community than eager enthusiasts were willing to acknowledge. These were the men, who, when the seeds of the first French revolution began to germinate—seeds which had been carried hither and thither throughout Europe, on the breath of human speech, and by the subtle currents of human thought, though often as little regarded as the light thistle-down which floats on the summer breeze

—these were the men who, by the magnitude of their fears, counterpoised the extravagant hopes of our earnest political reformers ; steadfast rocks, which, by their resistance to rapid progress, prevented changes being violent and sudden ; fast pillars often thought troublesome and in the way, which yet did the service of scaffolding, upholding the fabric while it was being strengthened and beautified ; clogs to the wheel according to the common and more expressive metaphor ; and they are appendages only despised by the rash and reckless traveller.

It need scarcely be added, that Mr. Bowring belonged to a good family ; that is to say, to the class of country gentry. From father to son, for several generations, their lands had descended ; though it must be observed, gradually diminished in extent, and deteriorated in value. The “let alone” plan, when everything around us is moving, is marvellously like retrogression ; and Mr. Bowring found it so to his cost, though

he puzzled about causes, and pertinaciously refused to acknowledge the real clue when it was offered him. His first wife had belonged to a “county family” also, and had inherited a daughter’s moderate fortune, secured on herself and the offspring of her marriage. Thus Lydia was provided for to the amount of a few thousand pounds.

Alice Armitage, the second wife, was the orphan daughter of a naval officer; without fortune, with few friends and no near relatives. She sometimes mentioned a second cousin, who was in one of the colonies seeking a fortune, but he was the only person even of her name, whom she knew. Mr. Bowring wooed and won her in haste. Her fell in love with her beauty and her grace; and all the high qualities of her nature, which he afterwards in some small degree appreciated, were a sort of over measure given in above and beyond the contract. One of his fixed ideas was, that women, so that they came of “decent people” and had been “pro-

perly brought up" where in character all alike; and, as Lydia's mother had been one of those chameleon persons who always take the hue of the nearest influence, his experience had not contradicted his theory. Alice was won by his love of herself, however that love had been kindled; and, besides, he was kind-hearted and considered amiable—handsome—only about ten years her senior; and the choice offered her was to be mistress of Stoneleigh, or brave the world in some of the hard positions which dependant gentlewomen fill—those unarmed soldiers, against whom nevertheless there is the most cruel press in the strife and struggle of social life.

It might be that bleak and barren Stoneleigh—bounded by a range of hills that seemed to stay and shut away the sweetness of the south—did not suit the constitution of Alice; it might be that the seeds of consumption had lain long undeveloped in her frame; it might be some slight neglected cold had ripened to

the fearful malady which now oppressed her. She had been delicate since the birth of her child, unable herself to afford him sustenance, and gradually as the winter deepened, had become more completely the invalid. Her husband was kind and attentive himself; fee'd physicians liberally, and was lavish in the bestowal of every comfort and luxury that could alleviate suffering; or that even the caprice of sickness could suggest or desire: but he was blind to the broad fact of her danger. Hearty and robust himself, belonging to a hale family, and incompetent to estimate how much in certain temperaments the vivid mind conceals the sinking of the mortal frame, he never for a moment realised that she in her youthful prime was fading and falling before his eyes. Lydia's mother had died of a sudden inflammatory attack; that was a thing he could understand—but a slight cough—a palpitation, “half fancy”—growing weak and thin “all for want of exercise”—“Pooh, pooh! she had only to take

care of herself through the winter, and she would be well enough in the spring."

Yes—well—as they are who do not belong to a world of strife and misunderstandings and human littleness, when their home of perfect love and perfect peace and perfect knowledge is found—at last !

Charlton Ridley was what is called a fine boy, tall for his age, and robust-looking. He inherited his mother's regularity of features, with a more vivid and decided expression. Mrs. Ridley professed to have a great dread of breaking his spirit; the consequence was, his will had remained unbent, and at six or seven years of age, it was beginning to be a little troublesome, and to show the want of judicious pruning and training. He and his mother had arrived at Stoneleigh much too late for the early nursery dinner, and so Master Charlton took his place in the dining-room, and prevented the meal being a *tête-à-tête* between the host and Mrs. Ridley.

“ Well, Charlton,” said Mr. Bowring, “ have you seen your cousin Lydia?”

“ Yes, just for a minute,” replied the boy, much more intent on the fish which was being served, than on anything else.

“ Why only for a minute?” continued his questioner.

“ It was my fault;” interrupted Mrs. Ridley, “ I was so fearful he would be noisy, and disturb dear Mrs. Bowring, that I would not take him up stairs with me.”

“ Yes—and, uncle, I did wish so much to go and see the pony; and Dick the groom saddled him for me, and I have had such a gallop.”

“ And what else did you do?” asked Mr. Bowring, good humouredly.

“ Why, black Fan had a lot of puppies, and they were going to kill all but two, and so I stayed to see them drowned.”

“ And were you not sorry?” continued Mr. Bowring.

“ O no; it was such fun. Though Fan

was sorry enough, I know. She went sniffing and whining into every corner of the stable ; and Dick says she snapped at his hand when he was taking them away ; though if she had bitten him, he would have given her such a beating."

"Boys will be boys!" murmured Mrs. Ridley, in a *sotto voce* tone of deprecation.

"Yes, yes," replied her host ; "but it was not a right thing for the boy to see, and I shall speak to my groom on the subject."

Of course Master Charlton heard the remark and the rejoinder ; and as the spectacle of puppy-drowning was to be henceforth a forbidden "pleasure," probably he congratulated himself all the more on the sight he had witnessed, and the experience it had afforded him.

While this conversation took place at the dinner table, a very different scene was enacting up stairs. Mrs. Bowring had raised herself from her reclining attitude, and sat with little

Mark upon her lap. Refreshed by his long slumber, he now looked up in her face with wide-awake eyes—they were of the same deep blue as her own—crowed and hummed, and as if he had found a pretty plaything, held fast with his tiny fingers one of her long curls that had escaped from the cap. No wonder that his baby endearments went straight to her heart, and that the young mother, with a deeper knowledge of her own condition than those about her suspected, felt her whole soul brimming with tenderness.

Little Lydia was in the room, but something more quiet and silent than usual. Like all sensitive natures, child as she was, she involuntarily concealed her emotions. It was not from any purposed deceit, that the evil counsel she had received remained untold. She felt her aunt's influence more than she understood it; the strongest and warmest feelings of her young heart had been appealed to; they seemed surrounded by a sacred veil of secrecy; it

would have been with tears and anguish alone that she could have spoken of Mrs. Ridley's injunctions, and there is no wonder that mere instinct taught her to shun self-torture. Of course the child did not analyse her feelings; later in life even, we rarely examine our motives and emotions, until the hour is past when self-knowledge would have been a defensive armour; and if the springs of action are but feeble in a child's mind, when compared with the strong desires of maturity, it is well to remember that their delicate machinery works with equal precision.

And thus it was, that Lydia Bowring's tongue was tied, and that the unwholesome thoughts, which if spoken, might have been dispelled by answering words of good sense and affection, remained to canker in her heart, wreathing themselves with dim memories of her own mother, and taking the shape of duties. Thus it was that she sat more quietly than usual, apparently still intent on her doll; thus

it was that she had slipped away from her step-mother's arm, when it encircled her ; and thus it was that this evening she made no attempt to play with her baby brother. Yet these were all such mere shades of manner, that there is no wonder they were unnoticed.

With the garrulity so common to favourite servants, nurse Morris told the tale of the puppy-drowning, expressing her opinion that it was "a horrid sight for a young boy to choose to see. But to be sure" she added, "boys were taught to be cruel—taught to think it a fine thing to look on, or take a part in such things ; a fine thing to have 'spirit,' which was all the same as wickedness and mischief. Much good might it do them—for her part she did not wonder that men were what they were. Tyrants the best of them, and not one heart among a dozen."

Poor Morris was out of breath with her harangue, delivered most earnestly ; for she had an evil opinion of the sterner sex in

general, such as many a gentle loving woman has acquired from some one bitter experience. It seemed her words had made some strange impression on Mrs. Bowring, for she said very gravely,—

“Nurse — you are older than I, you have seen much more of life—do you really think all men are tyrants, and hard-hearted?”

“Well, no — perhaps not all. But very nearly all in the bringing up are taught to be what they call themselves, ‘lords and masters.’ It’s my opinion that the people who write learned books about the bringing up of children, should spend a little time first in a nursery. Then they’d see how your ‘boys of spirit’ as they are called, *tyrantise* over the younger children, and their sisters of course ; frightening little creatures that would not harm a fly almost into fits with their playing guns ; poking out their doll’s eyes with imitation swords ; and even in their friendly play, mind you, always making the weaker

their 'prisoners,' their 'horses,' or their 'servants.' "

"I hope my little Mark will never be a tyrant," mused Mrs. Bowring, hardly conscious that she spoke her thoughts. "O nurse," she continued, in a voice that betrayed the ready tears; "O nurse, promise me that so far as you are able, you will teach him to be gentle and kind, to help the weak and suffering, never to oppress them; to be truthful above all things; to be brave in doing right, even when the right may seem to worldly eyes the foolish. Teach him to be unselfish in trifles, and he will not be greedy and grasping in great things. Shew him the sweetness of self-denial, when self-denial is a duty; and never make selfish pleasure or personal aggrandizement the reward of merit; or, if you cannot remember so much, make him, dear nurse, what a good woman would consider a good man. His father, his kind father knows that I wish all this; but nurse, dear Morris, you will have great

power and influence, and promise me to remember what I have asked you."

Poor Morris could not speak, for her heart was probed, and the tears were flowing. She knew the mother's days were numbered; she knew that not hers would be the hands to rear her child; and she could not frame a subtle speech of all unreal hope. But though she did not speak, her eyes met those of the invalid; and as honest Morris held out her arms for the boy, and pressed him with many kisses to her heart, there was something in her gesture that fell as sweetly as a solemn promise on the mother's heart!

And little Lydia? She heard; but all she comprehended was, that Mark was to be quite a different sort of boy from her cousin, Charlton Ridley — Charlton whom she had heard admired and praised from babyhood: again did it seem that the infant brother was set in some strange opposition to all her natural feelings!

CHAP. IV.

THE HOUSEHOLD AT STONELEIGH.

IT is not my purpose to dwell with minute and tedious detail on the childhood of Mark and Lydia Bowring. If we are shown but a fragment of a strong chain, and are told to what length its unbroken links are extended, we may form a correct idea of its power and durability: and thus the incidents already related may show the small beginnings of that cable-coil of influence which Mrs. Ridley exerted over her niece through the malleable years of girlhood.

Nor is it necessary to describe with painful precision how, week by week, and day by day, Mrs. Bowring gradually declined. Only towards the very last was her husband aroused

to the imminence of her condition ; only in time to smooth and sweeten inasmuch as his love and tenderness could do so, the awful hours of closing life. Almost with her last breath she commended little Mark to his care, and bade him remember all she had asked and wished concerning her boy ; and so she passed away, like a flower that falls with but half its leaves unfolded ; for Alice Bowring died with only a vague consciousness of the depths of her own nature. She was satisfied with her husband's affection, because it had not been her lot to experience a love more sympathetic and absorbing.

In this strange world of sunshine and shadow, thousands live and die without meeting a hand that can strike the key-note of their nature, and wakening heart and intellect to richness, and strength, and beauty, let the soul pour forth its unsuspected flood of varied harmony. Other thousands there are who meet too late with this awakening touch ; too late to set the

heart in unison with destiny, for its strings have been cracked and strained, and have been taught the world's discordant tones, and return but slowly and with weakened power to their natural sweetness. To such beings, sympathy comes too late to let in the full sunshine of existence, that kindles virtues, and ripens every excellence; but not too late it may be to recover some of the lost glories of a darkened life; to recall a sort of second youth, that gleams with a calm perpetual lustre, like the late, long-day summer of a far northern clime.

Alice with the chords of her young mother-heart just wakened, did not live long enough to have their full melody drawn forth; only for her was the morning of existence—not on earth was its noon-time.

Years swept by, Mr. Bowring grew a little stouter; a little bald on the crown of his head; and the dark locks which remained, gradually assumed an iron-grey tinge. He was not the man to ape youth when youth was past, and

he sank contentedly into the middle-aged country gentleman. He grew fonder of the country and country sports than ever; rarely visited the metropolis; rarely mingled in any society but that of his country neighbours; heeded very little, or heeded only to despise, a thousand social changes of which he heard but vaguely; and hugged his prejudices all the more closely, as year by year they twined themselves about his nature.

Though in the prime of life when left a second time a widower, Mr. Bowring never contemplated a third marriage. He remembered both his wives with a sort of quiet calm affection; but as time passed on, weakening the slight but still ennobling influence which the superior nature of Alice had exercised over him, his character sank down to its own old level, and Lydia's mother congenial and submissive, shone out the dearer of the two. True, Mrs. Ridley was often at his side; true, that the virtues of her departed sister were with that

lady a very favourite theme of conversation ; and I believe it was some apparently unpreserved remark of hers that made him discover an excellence in the circumstance of his first wife not having commended their daughter in an especial manner to his care, or entreated or advised any particular course of education. He began to think it was “so confiding” to rely wholly on him ; and he resolved the child should be requited by the tenderest care. In truth, he loved the little Lydia most dearly ; as fathers almost always love an only daughter.

In person Lydia resembled both her parents ; but as she grew up, she was thought more decidedly like her mother. From some remoter ancestor, however, she inherited keen sensibility and quick talents ; the first being little suspected, the latter self-evident. Few girls are handsome at twelve or thirteen years of age ; and Lydia Bowring was no exception to the rule ; but she gave promise of beauty to those who could make allowance for the gawkiness—there

is no other word—of that transition period. The roundness and easy grace of childhood were gone: and in their place was a tall lean figure, with long thin arms, and hands and feet that having attained their full growth looked large for the child, but would seem small as belonging to a fine grown woman. Her features were regular, her dark hair was rich and abundant, and her hazel eyes though a little sunken, were soft and intelligent, and gave the predominant expression to her countenance.

Years before, Mrs. Ridley had persuaded her brother-in-law to place his daughter at a fashionable London boarding school, under her peculiar care. Every Saturday the little girl was accustomed to go "home," as she called her aunt's residence in Russell Square; and as Charlton Ridley received his education, first at a grammar-school, and afterwards at the London University, the young cousins met always once a week. Moreover, their longer vacations were usually passed together at

Stoneleigh. Mrs. Ridley being willing if necessary, to relinquish her son's society that he might have the benefit of the "change;"—and an opportunity of cultivating Mr. Bowring's good graces. More often, however, Mrs. Ridley accompanied the youthful pair at their summer and winter vacations.

It is really time to introduce Mr. Ridley; and it shall be done briefly, as he is not very important to the present narrative. He held a government appointment of about twelve hundred a year, involving duties, which were light, methodical, and unvaried. They occupied him from ten o'clock till four every day, inclusive of abundant spare time for newspaper reading, and small-talk gossip; sometimes even for the mental working of chess problems, for Mr. Ridley's great passion was chess. Happy they, with a selfish happiness, who possess a hobby and sufficient leisure to ride it. Wives may govern, and children rebel—age creep on, and the resolutions of manhood be still

unfulfilled—and domestic affairs present a fair surface above a mass of rank inextricable confusion. How fair the water lily shines—how softly it rests upon its green cushion: and who thinks of the tangled stems, and their slimy bed, and the spotted reptiles that gambol among them!

Many people thought Mrs. Ridley quite a pattern for good wives. She never complained of her husband belonging to chess-clubs—never looked cold on his uncompanionable chess friends; nay, frequently invited them of her own free will, especially if she had an evening engagement for herself. She even studied the game, so as to play well enough not to be vanquished too easily; yet always bore defeat with unsoured temper. Everybody said, how well matched, and what a happy couple they were; so alike in their tastes, so united, so mutually obliging.

But while the Ridleys played chess, and Lydia grew tall, and Charlton studied Greek

and Latin, little Mark had changed from the speechless infant to the boy of seven years old. We left him in the arms of his faithful nurse, and we find him still tenderly loved and cherished by her. Tenderly indeed ; for Morris loved nothing on earth so well, and thought nothing so good and so beautiful.

It must be confessed, however, that Mark would have been denied all claims to beauty by those people who love animal beauty, and think it the type of excellence in masculine creatures. My hero—for Mark I must consider such—was not in the least a “fine” child ; was neither mischievous, nor what is called full of spirit ; in fact, he was rather a girlish little boy.

Like Lydia, he was tall for his age, but slight to a degree of fragility. The net-work of his blue veins was clearly to be traced beneath his very fair transparent skin, both about his throat and on his temples, where the silky golden hair sloped off from his high and broad

forehead. His eyes, of a deep blue, seemed strangely large for his thin face; and perhaps were the more remarkable from being curtained by curved lashes many shades darker than his hair. Every one called him a "delicate" child; and yet he was not a sickly one. He had struggled through several of the complaints incident to childhood, without their leaving any evil results; and despite his fragile appearance, must have possessed a good constitution.

There is another unheroic characteristic to acknowledge: at seven years old, Mark Bowring was what most people would consider an arrant dunce. He could read, and that was all; and how in fact that elementary acquirement became his, it would be very difficult to say. Nurse Morris piqued herself on having taught him the alphabet; and remembered helping him to spell out the description appended to a portfolio of engravings. Weeks afterwards, he sought help from his father, who felt rather amused by giving him a short and occasional

lesson. But “school tasks” were still unknown to him ; grammar was an unimagined mystery ; geography a shadowy dream ; even writing was unattempted, and arithmetic strictly mental.

Under Providence, it was to this accidental neglect, that Mark Bowring owed health if not life. Had his young mind been forced, it would have burst its casket.

As for what he knew, and thought, and felt, it can only be guessed at vaguely ; and the mind of a young child is at any time to be approached with reverence.

There was One Volume, of which, thanks to nurse Morris, he was not ignorant. He knew Bible stories out of number, and with the beautiful instinct of wisdom, preferred beyond all comparison those from the New Testament. He had a queer quaint way of delivering his opinions, that sometimes startled Morris. His small knowledge of profane history was curiously mingled with fable ; he believed in his heart if he had examined it—the history of

Robinson Crusoe, to be as authentic as that of the Norman conquest ; and while wondering if fairy-tales were *all* true, had a secret belief that fairies would some day come back to the earth.

Little Mark loved books and pictures better than rude sports : indeed, he was almost frightened at Charlton Ridley's rough play. In short, as I have said before, he was a girlish little boy ; just such a gentle loving spiritual creature, as we can dream the poet Shelley must have been in his misunderstood childhood, when surrounding coldness drove the fire of his nature inward ; when tyrannic dogmatism kindled a frenzy to oppose it ; when he began “to learn in suffering what he taught in song.” Happily for little Mark, not yet had he felt the chill of coldness or unkindness ; and every day that he breathed the atmosphere of tenderness and affection, his character was strengthening the better to withstand a shock.

The secret of this calm routine was, that he

was too gentle to give trouble to any one ; and therefore it precisely suited the let-alone system of the methodical and somewhat indolent Mr. Bowring. However, we must not conceal the fact, that Mark was nearly always the companion of nurse Morris ; and perhaps it was well that he was removed from associates, who could by any sort of antagonism have stimulated his faculties. Her caressing affection ; her natural truth and kindness, which taught both by example ; and her garrulity which amused his mind without fatiguing it, were influences, at his age, a thousand times more precious than the finest intellectual training that Knowledge could have devised !

CHAP. V.

A CHILD'S SORROW.

SEVEN years since, little Mark was a baby, when Lydia watched near his cot, and dressed her doll by the fire-light. Now she presides at her father's breakfast table; and, truth to tell, is an accomplished young hostess. The fashionable school by no means neglects the cultivation of the toilet; and Lydia is becomingly dressed in a close-fitting high frock of claret-colour merino. Any over-womanly appearance, however, is avoided by the juvenile style of her hair, which falls in two long plaits upon her shoulders, fastened at the ends by bows of ribbon; and by the juvenile shortness of the dress, which plainly displays a pair of frilled trowsers: the latter, a pretty

fashion then beginning, except for younger children, to wane ; the former, a convenient one in its first flush of novelty.

The breakfast was spread in the old library at Stoneleigh ; one of the largest and most comfortable rooms in the house. Three windows looked out into the garden, and their deep embrasures always suggested the idea, that each, with the assistance of a screen, might be converted into a separate little chamber. The walls were entirely covered by old books enclosed in glazed book-cases ; and old pictures bordered by narrow old fashioned frames.

A thick carpet felt soft to the feet, and thick curtains kept off all possible draughts ; while the winter sun, shining upon a mass of newly fallen snow without, and the large bright fire literally roaring within, seemed to make the room more light than on the brightest summer day.

A silver urn of the true urn-shape hissed

invitingly; the coffee gave out a fresh and fragrant odour; yellow cream, as if unwilling to leave the quaint-shaped, spindle-legged, silver jug, clung to the lip as it was poured; a north-country pie was ready to disgorge at the bidding of hearty appetites, and fresh-laid eggs, and velvet cutting tongue awaited more delicate tastes. Mark, in consideration of the season, and in honor of the guests, breakfasted with them, and had crept close to Lydia; some instinct seemed to tell him that he must love his sister very dearly. Charlton Ridley looked handsome, manly, and impatient. The Christmas present of his uncle, as he called Mr. Bowring, had been a gun; and, eager to try his prowess, he looked from time to time towards the windows, enjoying a foretaste of his sport. Mr. Bowring was good-humoured and contented; Mrs. Ridley as sombre in the outward woman as ever, save that her countenance was just perceptibly lighted by a feeling of pride in her bold, handsome son.

Charlton was the first to finish breakfast ; and certainly as he strode, gun in hand, from the room, his fine figure drawn to its full height, and his cheek wearing the flush of youth and health, a stranger would have found ready excuses for maternal pride. Presently he was seen crossing the lawn, suitably equipped in a shooting coat, which rendered his appearance still less boyish.

“ What a fine youth he has grown ! ” exclaimed Mr. Bowring, following the receding figure with his eye ; “ there, Mark,” he added, turning to his son, “ when will you be as much of a man as Charlton ? ”

Mark blushed, and turning his head a little on one side, said shyly—

“ I don’t know, papa, for I am only a little boy now.”

“ Poor child ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Ridley, in a tone of condolence ; though really as great boys must have been little ones once, her compassion seemed unnecessary.

"To be sure, to be sure," continued Mr. Bowring; "but I hope, Mark, one day you will be as fine a fellow as Charlton; and whenever you can carry and handle a gun, you shall have one."

Little Mark had no answer ready. He looked up from his occupation—which was just then sweeping some crumbs from the table-cloth into his hand—first at Lydia, but her eyes were fixed in unmistakeable admiration on the young sportsman out of doors; then at his father, and at Mrs. Ridley, but nowhere did he find sympathy for his thought. So he was silent, though fully conscious that a gun was by no means the object of his ambition; and that, for a reason which they would have but little comprehended, Charlton was at that moment the occasion to him of a half-defined terror.

In a few minutes, little Mark glided from his chair, and, with one hand closed, quickly made his way to the nursery. "Now, dear Mossy"

fencing, skating, sure triumphs to be esteemed by the country gentleman—and even of the admiration his person had excited—their neighbour, Sir Thomas Lawrence, having, not long before his death, stopped Charlton in the square, enquired his name and age, and likened him to some noble sitter, whose portrait was just then the rage.

It must not be supposed, that Mrs. Ridley forced all this on the ear of Mr. Bowring; no she had the clever trick of making it appear that his remarks drew forth her reminiscences. Lydia sat silent with eyes intently fixed on the glowing embers, but the clue once given of Mrs. Ridley's purpose, which had been quietly, carefully, and systematically pursued for months and years, an ordinary intelligence must have perceived how successful she had been. Day by day the seed had germinated; and growing tendrils began to weave themselves about Lydia's young heart, shaping it already to their bondage, and

shadowing forth in outline tracery a Life's History in one controlling passion.

Mrs. Ridley and her listeners were startled by the report of a gun, evidently fired close to the house; and the next instant a piercing shriek from upstairs, and quick continued ringing of a bell gave token of some disaster. They hastened to the nursery, and there beheld little Mark supported by nurse Morris, his bleeding cheek literally washed by the fast-flowing tears. It was not, however, for his own injuries that he was weeping—*injuries caused not by shot, but by the broken pane of the window near which he had been leaning—in his hands and pressed to his bosom he held the wounded starling, which writhed in its death agony, and, with gasping beak, uttered shrill cries.* Morris was tenderly and lovingly striving to remove the particles of broken glass which had been driven into his cheek, and though he flinched once or twice beneath the operation, it

was clear that the tears and the anguish were for the suffering bird, and its fellows which lay stretched beneath the window. One of the servants drawn to the spot by the noise removed the starling from his grasp, and with compassionate hand ended its misery ; and a sponge and warm water, and Morris's careful touch, soon eased the cut cheek. But still little Mark sobbed piteously.

“Come, my boy,” said his father ; “be more of a man. I would not cry for a few scratches ; and you know very well that Charlton did not mean to hurt you—he could not tell that you were at the window ; though certainly it was imprudent to fire so near.”

“O, papa, I am not crying about my cheek,” sobbed Mark ; looking up with his large eyes, and trying to force back the tears.

“For what, then ?”

“For the birds—the dear birds that came every morning for their breakfast.”

A laugh from Mr. Bowring was the hard

retort. A laugh, that to a sensitive child is more bitter than a blow. And then he added, "Why, birds, you know, were made to be shot —did I not promise you a gun when you were old enough to carry one?"

"I don't want a gun, and I never will be a sportsman," replied the boy; stung by the laugh into an ungracious answer.

"Hey-day! Is that the way you speak? The next time I promise you a pleasure, I hope your manners will have improved. Come, Aunt Ridley, I think we are not wanted here."

"Poor Charlton will be so sorry!" exclaimed the mother.

"It was a pure accident," said Mr. Bowring; "I see that: such a good mark was not to be resisted; I am sure I should have done the same myself."

Lydia remained a little while longer in the nursery; she had not the heart to leave her brother in such deep sorrow. Yet she had not

sympathy ; she could but repeat the old story, “don’t be such a baby ; don’t cry. Charlton never cries.”

“Humph!” muttered nurse Morris, more than once, “Humph!” and presently Lydia left them.

And then it was that Morris took the boy on her knee, and kissing him fondly, she said :—

“Listen to me, Mark ; you were rude to your papa, and you must beg his pardon. But this is all you have done wrong, this morning. Never think it manly to be hard-hearted, or cruel ; and always remember, that your mother’s dying wish, was, that you should grow ‘what a good woman would call a good man.’”

“Talk to me, Mossy, for a little while about poor mamma, and then I will go and beg papa’s pardon.”

CHAP. VI.

THE COMING CHANGE.—A SEPARATION.

Of course due allowance was made for little Mark's petulance, and he was easily restored to favour. As for Charlton, he had the wit to see that Mr. Bowring was not seriously displeased with him ; and the vague sort of regret that he expressed to the little boy, for the accident which had occurred, was not unaccompanied by ridicule. Lydia had winced at the sight of the wounded bird, and put her hands to her ears to close them against its cries ; but when she heard her cousin's banter on the subject, she thought it a fine thing for boys to be brave and daring ; and wondered if her brother Mark would ever be such a bold,

clever, handsome youth as Charlton. These, however, were not the only results of the incident. Little Mark's failings being once brought under discussion, Mrs. Ridley "thought it her duty" to give her opinion distinctly on the subject; and as Charlton and Lydia both happened to be present on the occasion, and must have observed with what grateful attention Mr. Bowring received her advice, the sentiments enunciated, probably deepened impressions already made.

It was the morning following poor Mark's distress, when nurse Morris was summoned to a conference in the library.

"Sit down, nurse," said Mr. Bowring; in a tone, which, considering his usually cold, undemonstrative manner, was quite cordial; "sit down; we want to talk to you about a change that it is time should take place."

Poor Morris had a presentiment that her great trial was coming; and she sat uneasily at the edge of a chair, twirling the corner of a little

shawl which she generally wore, and looking down to hide that her eyes were filling with tears.

"You see, Mark is no longer a baby," exclaimed Mr. Bowring, delivering himself of a truism.

"I know that," murmured Morris; "and—"

"At his age" interposed Mrs. Ridley, "my son had begun a regular course of study; and I have every reason to rejoice that his childhood was not wasted by treatment only fit for a girl."

"In short," continued Mr. Bowring, "we have determined on sending your little charge to school; and I wished to give you the first intimation, that you might have plenty of time to suit yourself. The years you have been in my service, prove the satisfaction you have given; and I need hardly say that you may depend on a warm recommendation, to any situation you may obtain."

Choking tears sadly hindered the old servant's speech; but she managed to articulate—

“ Of course, I knew that some day it must come to this—but—sir—pray—sir—excuse my feelings—how I love that child, nobody alive knows—and—if—if I might stay in the family, just to be able to see him sometimes—that is—I don’t mind wages, if—if—” but here her sobs were overpowering.

“ You distress me very much,” said Mr. Bowring. And this was quite true; for he was one of that numerous class, who are distressed, when suffering of any sort is made apparent to them; who are even capable of exercising a spurious benevolence to rid themselves of the disagreeable sight; but who know not the wide sympathy and the generous impulse which seek out sorrow to mitigate it, and endure the contemplation of pain in order to lighten another’s burthen, “ You distress me very much,” he continued, “ and the more so that I cannot accede to your proposal. The fact is—and I may as well own it—my income is not what it was. Of

late years my land has been sadly unproductive of profit—and now, that the education of my children is added to my expenses, I fear I shall be obliged to reduce my establishment, instead of creating a new office. But let me see a cheerful face, my good woman, the world is wide, and you are yet in the prime of your days."

Poor Morris had not a reply to so positive a dismissal, and she bowed her head in token of submission, yet her feelings would have play, and presently she said,

"I ask your pardon for my boldness, but, in consideration of my long service, pray forgive it. What I have to say is this. Nobody knows Master Mark so well as I do: and I can't bear to hear him spoken of as a dull boy. He has many sorts of knowledge beyond his years; and as for goodness—I really don't know a fault he has: any one may rule him with kind words, for he has a tender little heart, and I think harshness would break it."

"But a Boy should not be a milk-sop, Morris," said Mr. Bowring; "and really all you tell me only confirms my opinion that it is high time he was sent to school."

Morris was calmer now. Intuitively she felt that neither she nor "her boy" was understood by those in authority; sympathy would have encouraged her tears to flow, but sympathy was not for her. Besides, her good sense told her that it was time Mark's education should commence; and she determined to nerve herself to the separation whenever the hour for it should arrive. She rose, considering that her master had finished his communication, but saying as she did so—

"Does my boy know that he is going to school? O no, of course not, or he would have told me."

"You can mention it if you like," said Mr. Bowring; "if it is any sorrow to him, no doubt he will bear it better from you than from me."

“O Sir, I shall not tell it him as a sorrow,
you may be sure.”

There was a great deal of quiet heroism in the character of nurse Morris; in addition to—or perhaps derived from—her shrewd good sense and intuitive good feeling. She hid from her darling as much as possible her own grief at the impending separation; and painted “school” in colours so bright that Mark’s cheek flushed, and his eye kindled as the new life, a life of the wakening intellect, appeared as an enchanting vision before him. And yet his arm lingered fondly round the neck of his nurse as he listened, and his warm, rosy lips pressed many a kiss on her faded cheek, as they talked of the separation. One deeper skilled in the reading of character than honest Morris, would, perhaps, have felt assured, that in Mark Bowring, intellect and emotion were yoked together, directing, strengthening each other, already rounding his character to the most admirable mould, yet

leaving his nature liable to keenest suffering and bitterest disappointment.

When Morris perceived that her purpose was gained—that the boy looked on the coming change, not as a sorrow, but as a strange, new, and bright path that was opening for him, then she began discoursing of his mother, of her last words and her last wishes, and be sure the often-repeated phrase was not forgotten ; “Teach him to be what a good woman would consider a good man.” Too young at present to take in all its meaning, nevertheless, Mark cherished it in his memory ; and by degrees it sank deep into his heart, and became a rule of conduct.

Mr. Bowring was delighted that his son appeared so willing to go to school ; this willingness being received as a token that he was not quite a milk-sop after all.

Mrs. Ridley hoped, that wherever he was sent, he would have the advantage of strict discipline.

Charlton wished Mark were going to “the

College," it would be "such fun to see him among the boys." Lydia, the experienced school girl, who remembered the coldness and barrenness of a first entrance into the Child's World, almost pitied the ignorance of her little Brother.

Mr. Bowring put an advertisement in the Times, recommending Morris as an experienced nurse, and confidential servant; and everybody thought her extremely fortunate to have three answers from which to negotiate. No one comprehended the laceration of her heart, at the sundering of its dearest ties; and though it may seem a solecism to say so, she did not, at the time, know how much she suffered. Whitened hair, and failing health, and broken spirits, told afterwards the strait through which she had passed.

It is curious to observe, how commonly people complain of the want of attachment and affection in their servants—and yet when they find these qualities, they seem to expect them to

be put on and off like a garment. But it may be that I grow querulous, from the vista I see of petty cares for Morris, and childish troubles for "her boy;" with neither of which shall my readers be detained, for in the next chapter I carry them forward——years.

CHAP. VII.

LYDIA'S CONFESSION.

TEN years have passed, and if we look into the old library at Stoneleigh, we shall perceive the evidences of their flight. And yet there are some inanimate objects, which seem obstinately immutable, as if they would mock alike at youth and age. The old bronze clock on the chimney-piece, supported by the figure of Time with his lifted scythe, tells the minute as truly as ever, when the mimic blade mows imaginary grass, and in the act strikes the hour. There have been few new books added to the ancient store; and the old ones, in their substantial bindings, are arranged as of yore. But there has also been no new "plenishing" of

more perishable things, and consequently the carpet is perceptibly worn ; the curtains are faded to a tinge as colourless as—Mrs. Ridley's dresses ; and Mr. Bowring's leathern covered easy chair is rubbed at the arms and back to a shabby bareness. Mr. Bowring looks fully his age—the shady side of fifty ; his fringe of hair is very white ; the “crows' feet” are strongly marked ; he stoops, wears spectacles ; and his wrinkled, and rather trembling hand, is that of quite an old man. Mr. Bowring belonged sufficiently to the “old school” to be a free liver, though without passing into positively intemperate habits.

But if Time had with one hand robbed manhood of its might, he had with dexter touch rounded the form of Lydia to graceful beauty. Hers was the somewhat rare loveliness of fairest skin, allied to darkest eyes and hair. The old poets were right in their reiterated comparison of a fair skin to the lily flower. No brow or throat wearing the hue of health,

ever resembled the cold "snow," or hard opaque "ivory," or glossy semi-transparent "pearl;" but the warm creamy white, of the tall garden queen, half fainting beneath her load of perfume is a true type of a human beauty; and when a glossy curl strayed upon Lydia's shoulder, or a braid sloped beneath her ear, the seeker for simile might fancy that a raven's plume was set upon a crowd of lilies. Her eyes were of almost oriental lustre; her cheeks were tinged with the pink of a sea shell; and her finely chiselled lips dyed in the deeper shade of its neighbouring coral. Lydia was very beautiful; too beautiful for the fact to be disputed, or to be considered only a matter of opinion.

It was summer time, and Mr. Bowring and his daughter sat at a table near one of the open windows. The sunlight streamed through the half-drawn blinds; the fragrance of the flower garden stole in by fitful gusts; and save for the note of a bird now and then, there reigned that

delicious silence which is never to be found for a moment near a great city. The table was strewn with newspapers and letters, for the post-bag had been recently delivered; and it was evident that some intelligence of more than ordinary interest had been received. The needle work on which Lydia had been previously engaged, had fallen unheeded at her feet, while her restless fingers still crushed and crumpled an open letter. Her eyes drooped as if she were fearful to reveal their expression, and yet a tear or two had stolen down her cheeks.

Mr. Bowring pushed up his spectacles over his forehead, and leaned back in his chair, in an attitude of mournful regret.

“Vexations, it is said, seldom come singly,” he exclaimed. “As if it were not enough to receive such a letter as this from your brother, making some objection to every path in life I would have him pursue,—but I must hear from your lips this positive refusal of a marriage-offer in every respect most eligible.”

“Above my ambition,” murmured Lydia.

“Tush!—do not make such idle excuses. Sir George Frereton has, in one sense, done you honour by his proposal—but our family is as old as his—and no girl ever refused a lover because he was too rich, or his station too exalted. Besides, this is the third offer which, to my knowledge, you have declined: by heavens, if you had not lived since you came from school, from day to day, under my own eye, I should believe you had formed some attachment, which you have taken pains to hide from me.”

Lydia essayed to speak; but her lips parted without a sound escaping from them. Little observing, as Mr. Bowring usually was, he could not fail to see that her cheek grew pale, and that her frame quivered with suppressed emotion. He rose, seized her wrist which he held tightly, and shook her almost violently, but he uttered only her name.

“Lydia—Lydia!”

Still she did not speak: but her head dropped heavily on the table; and with but one hand at liberty, she shrouded her face with the thick curls that drooped across it.

“Lydia—speak;” said Mr. Bowring, hoarsely, and perhaps, unconsciously, pressing her wrist so hard, that the hand became red and swollen.

“Father!—pity!”

“Yes—pity perhaps, if it be a gentleman—yet no gentleman would seek my daughter’s hand clandestinely. Lydia, speak the truth, this moment.”

“Water—water,” seemed all the poor girl was able to utter.

This entreaty roused Mr. Bowring to a consciousness of her suffering; and loosening his hold, he found a carafe of water in the dining-room, without the intervention of a servant. “Now speak,” he continued, when she had drunk.

“Father, have pity—how can I speak, when

I do not even know that—that—he regards me at all ;” and now that pride was all crushed by such a confession, the tears burst forth in merciful relief.

“So—so—a daughter of mine has been unmaidenly enough to fall in love with a handsome face—that never cast one look on her.”

Lydia only moaned, as her head was still bowed in anguish. But in the agitation of the scene, her dress had become loose and disordered ; and as she bent lower and lower, with that strange sinking to the earth which deep mental distress always occasions, a locket fell from her bosom and hung suspended by a slender chain. Mr. Bowring recognised the trinket in an instant as a birthday gift years ago from Charlton Ridley, in those early days, when the elders look on with smiles at the innocent play of childish lovers. A curl of rich dark hair marvellously like that belonging to the giver of the locket

was enclosed, and quick in his conjecture, and speaking as if an incubus were removed, he exclaimed.

“It is!—O Lydia tell me that it is your cousin Charlton Ridley!”

Something like a moan was still the reply, as she sank on her knees by her father’s side, and leaned her head upon his shoulder. In a minute his arms encircled her, and a kiss upon her cheek assured her that at least she had not a parent’s anger to dread.

“Well—well,” he continued; “I suppose I might have foreseen it. And yet I never did—I have looked on him so long as a son, that I had almost forgotten you were not his sister. Charlton has not much money, but he will make his way at the Bar, and he is a gentleman, without the absurd notions which make your brother contemptible. Mark had better take care; for my land is not entailed—and if Charlton really become my son, it will go hard if I do not make his income easy.”

“But he may never ask it—never wish it, O Father, I entreat you keep this dreadful secret which you have discovered; and do not rend my heart by letting him suspect his influence. And, Father, do not set him in opposition to Mark: I see, I feel the difference in their characters, I know the weakness of the one; I sometimes think I do not love him as I ought to love an only brother: and yet there is some strange influence in my soul which sets it most at peace when I think most kindly of poor Mark. Don't be harsh with him to benefit me, or your benefits will never bless; and O, again I ask of you, hide my folly—my wild dreams from—from Charlton.”

“Rest assured,” said Mr. Bowring, replying only to the one entreaty; “rest assured that I will not humble you or myself. Had I been asked from his general manner to decide, I should certainly have thought it more likely that he admired you, than that you had any especial regard for him, and it

will not be very difficult, when next I have an opportunity, to ascertain at any rate what his plans of life are."

"If I could only believe that I had had an excuse for loving him!" murmured Lydia.

"Now my mind is drawn to the subject," continued Mr. Bowring, "I really think he has been what people call 'attentive'—and if I find he has trifled with my motherless girl—"

"I entreat—I implore," exclaimed Lydia, "that you betray me not—O Father—Father, you will drive me mad."

"Be still—be still—I will take care—he will be here one day this week; I remember he promised to spend a day or two with us after the Assizes at L——, and my mind is made up."

But Lydia's heart could not be still. She saw that her father was lashing himself up to a belief that she was wronged—and though he reiterated his promises of discretion she

could not feel wholly assured. They were tears wrung from heart-anguish which she shed that day; and bitterer still were those which in the silence and solitude of night wetted her pillow. But extreme mental anguish may be as soporific as bodily fatigue, and at last she slept a heavy sleep; as her slumbers grew lighter they were ruffled by dreams in which past, and present, and a possible future were wildly confused, and in which Mark and Charlton seemed wrestling in spiritual combat. The dead too were restored, the well remembered image of Mark's mother, and the dimmer shade of her own; and these seemed to have pity on her, and yet she fell—fell—down a steep precipice, but midway her brother's hand supported her—and then, trembling in every limb, she awoke with a cry of distress. It was morning; the sunshine streamed into her chamber, and the shadow of a woodbine, trained across her window, quivered on the ceiling.

CHAP. VIII.

A BETROTHAL.

IT is curious to remark how often, under feelings of strong mental excitement, the calm routine of social custom and usual habits remains uninterrupted. Beneath the polished cheerfulness, and thoughtful courtesy of refined society, how many hearts are there which inwardly vibrate to a word or a voice; which thrill with anxious hopes and fears; which muse like mourners by a grave over past happiness; or build aerial fabrics for the future; and yet have a ready smile on the lip, and a gracious word for the guest, and a ready *mot* to drop on the surface-chatter of their little world! Even those fiery passions which work

woe in a widening circle, often exist unsuspected like the slumbering volcano and the brooding earthquake, making their reality known at last by terrible results.

And so for many succeeding days, Lydia Bowring fulfilled her usual duties, and continued her habitual employments, as she had done for months and years, without betraying to an observer how little her heart was with any of them. Tacitly it seemed understood, that the subject of her forced confession should not be resumed by her father; and yet she felt that his eye was upon her, and so—she sat more diligently to her painting, read with more seeming perseverance, and plied her embroidery needle more continuously than ever. Music! — ah, this she neglected, for music beyond most things unlocks the flood-gates of association; and there were songs she would not have trusted herself to sing, and sounds she did not dare call forth to float upon the wandering air. But Mr. Bowring had not a

perception delicate enough to track such omissions, or find the clue to increased assiduity; and so in a few days, he grew to think that the display of her emotions had exaggerated her feelings, and that perhaps the whole affair was a “mere fancy after all.” Nevertheless, he would “sound” Charlton Ridley on the first opportunity, for she might have chosen worse, and if Mark provoked him by his dogged wilfulness, he should know which to consider the more truly his son.

“The heart, in waking, wakes the mind;” and there were many things, both in art and in nature, which Lydia had only recently comprehended. Beauty had now an inner meaning, a soul of expression, that spoke to her soul in many tongues, and in the blue sky or the green fields, the lordly trees that stretch their arms towards heaven, as if in perpetual adoration—the bright flowers that burst from their buds and fade so soon, as though surcharged with happiness—in all the myriad wonders which

weave their web of loveliness around the earth, she now found sympathy—companionship.

One day she had walked beyond the limits of her usual stroll, although her ramble had still been confined within the boundaries of Stoneleigh. As I before hinted, it was not situated in a fertile or beautiful country; but there are few soils in England so ungracious, as to refuse some homage of loveliness to the mid-summer; and Stoneleigh had its waving trees, and its bright flowers, and its glancing waters, and the ridge of hills that gave dignity to an otherwise tame landscape. No wonder that in her present mood Lydia loved rather to extend her solitary ramble—where nothing jarred upon her reveries—than to assume the mask of composure which she had taught herself to wear.

The wide folding-doors of the entrance hall stood open that warm summer day; and as Lydia entered with light step, she loosened the strings of her garden bonnet, and carelessly threw down on the hall table a bunch of wild

flowers she had gathered. Her little Blenheim spaniel with canine forgiveness of some recent neglect, bounded to her feet, and testified his joy and affection with all the sagacity of his race. Then he frolicked towards the door of the library, as if he would apprise her that she was wanted in that direction. She touched the handle, which turned easily, and had advanced some paces before she perceived that her father's large chair was occupied by—
Charlton Ridley.

The visitor appeared too completely self-possessed to show any embarrassment, if he felt it; but Lydia's voice trembled as she said, after some half articulate and common-place phrase of greeting—

“Where is papa? have you seen papa? I left him here.”

“Oh yes; I arrived two hours ago, and have had a long chat with him. He is now gone out riding.”

As Charlton Ridley stood holding Lydia's

hand, with a gentle pressure—and longer than cousinly courtesy prescribed — his handsome person and polished bearing seemed indeed an excuse for a woman's preference. Above the common height, his figure was full, rather than slight; perhaps, even it promised in future years to be stout; though at present there was only the symmetry of an athlete. The head was large; but a profusion of thick, dark curling hair concealed its outline. Every feature was handsome, and the eyes were of that changeful steel-grey which is so often mistaken for black. But there are fine eyes which nevertheless are not pleasant eyes to meet. Eyes, whose radiance seems not the soft sunlight borrowed from heaven, and which, as it meets our own earnest gaze, sheds upon our hearts its sweet wealth of love, and peace, and gentleness — but whose lustre is almost fierce in its brightness; eyes which bewilder the most honest speaker, he knows not why; eyes which seem always examining, and never trusting; which have a

lightning flame in anger, and nothing much softer than a sense of self-satisfaction in what the owner calls—love; and yet which not seldom exercise a basilisk's influence in the charmed circle they control. Such eyes were Charlton Ridley's; and as he bent them now on Lydia, with a look that was not new to her, and which she felt rather than saw, her frame quivered, and a dizziness mounted to her brain.

“Sit down, dear Lydia,” said Charlton, in a tone of unusual softness; for one of his gifts was the power of modulating his voice to an almost infinite variety of expression. “I have much to say to you, that would have been said long ago — had I—could I have hoped that your father would have been as generous, as he has proved himself to day. Lydia, have you not suspected that I loved you, and that only the uncertainty of my position prevented my telling you so.” As he spoke, he seated himself beside her, and stole his arm round her waist.

They were the first words of love he had ever spoken to her, whatever his manner might have implied: it was the first caress she had ever received, but she could not shrink from it, and she could not answer to his speech. Her silence was more expressive than words, and he had already kissed her cheek—her lips—before her maiden modesty asserted its sovereignty, and she extricated herself from his embrace.

Charlton Ridley had all the dreadful advantages of a man of the world. Though still in the hey-day of youthful manhood, he had exhausted so much of Life that it had few novelties in store for him; for the things he had not tasted,—heart-love and pure pleasures—were cut off from him by a brazen barrier, guarded by those spirit “dwellers on the threshold,” which his own base and selfish passions had evoked. Oh, if the young girl could but know, what too often the woman of thirty has proved, how many a life would

flow forth like a flower-bordered river reflecting all the lights of heaven,—that, instead, gurgles on in darkness, a troubled turbid stream, its freshness gone, its treasures sunk and wasted! Oh that the young girl would take on faith what only bitter experience can make her know, that the captivating lover so winning in his wiles, so ready in his speech, so bold in his looks, who plans to “come, and see, and conquer,” and meets too often with a Cæsar-like success, has purchased his power by the sacrifice of every attribute that would have been a fair barter for her love; that his ease and self-possession are the proof that he is acting an often rehearsed part; that he can no more respond to her gushing tenderness, her perfect faith, and her elysium dreams, than a tree whose roots have been charred by a forest fire, can send forth fresh green leaves and balmy blossoms!

Oh that she would believe that the soul's modesty is not confined to one sex: and

that it is most frequently the bashful lover, who stammers forth his love, who has no eloquent phrases in which to express it, whose cheek changes, and whose tones falter as much as do her own, who has for her the heart's wealth of a pure unsullied passion, and the tideless tenderness which alone can satisfy her heart's vague aspirations !

A summer day with the odours of garden and meadow stealing across the senses, and the rustling of leaves, the song of birds, and the hum of happy insect-life breaking as chorus to the fondest words from the lips she loved ; a summer night with the golden moon rising in majesty behind a grove of trees heavy with their dark green panoply, and still the honeyed words as they walked beneath those hanging boughs, with arms enwreathed and fingers interlaced : — was there no angel so cruelly kind as to show to Lydia Bowring the goal to which with blinded eyes her footsteps tended ?

CHAP. IX.

THE FIANCÉ AT HOME.

Mrs. Ridley and her son sat at dessert, in the dining-room in Russell Square. Ten years had changed the lady wonderfully little—by way of compensation, perhaps, for the fact as before remarked, that even in her youth she had scarcely looked young. It was a warm evening—the dusty trees in the square, hardly moved in the breeze—and the loud sound of a piano, next door, testified that the windows of both houses must be open ; nevertheless, Mr. Ridley, sen., had donned a great coat preparatory to a stroll, which was to end in a chess appointment, while his shrunken figure, and sallow cheeks,

were unmistakeably typical of the valetudinarian.

Charlton sipped his wine, and held his glass towards the light, with that air of connoisseurship which has something in it a little repellent in the young. But he was at home, both literally and figuratively, for it was seldom, in any companionship, that he felt so thoroughly at his ease as with his mother.

“So you are not surprised,” he said, pursuing a conversation which had been commenced as soon as they were alone, “so you are not surprised, that the éclaircissement has come? I might perhaps have kept it off a little longer; but the fact was, that he really made the proposal, not I—though, poor old gentleman, I must do him the justice to say, he meant so such thing—and I am certain believes at this moment, that he managed the affair with skilful diplomacy.

“And he may as well think so,” replied Mrs. Ridley; “unless we should have occasion to

undeceive him. I don't give him credit for quite so much observation ; yet it is possible, that he may know as well as I do, that his daughter has been in love with you ever since she left off pinafores."

Charlton bowed with a sort of mock gravity, as if in acknowledgment of a compliment, and then exclaimed, "Poor cousin Lydia ! Well, I flatter myself, I behaved like a *preux chevalier*, and wooed as humbly as if she had never bestowed on me the faintest hope. Really though, she is very handsome ; and what with the freshness, and the trepidation, and the simplicity, which had not a suspicion how the thing had come about, it was positively interesting ; and I am quite reconciled to the loss of the pretty widow, who jilted me for a title, and melted her gold into a coronet."

"Well—well, I am glad you are so contented ; but still it would have been better, if you had not compromised yourself entirely, until we were more certain of that wretched

boy's position with his father—though I hate even to call him Mr. Bowring's son."

"Mother, Mark will never be a favourite. As I told you before, Mr. Bowring spoke with positive wrath about him, his last offence being a firm refusal to enter the army, just as he had formerly declined the navy."

"He was a poor puny child," continued Mrs. Ridley; "I never thought he would have lived until now. Lydia is my only sister's only child; and certainly, I will own it, I have always wished that I might see her your wife, provided of course that she is not deprived of the fortune to which she was born."

"I am too poor to marry imprudently," returned Charlton, "though, really, many men would think my cousin Lydia charming enough to be an excuse for a piece of folly. But I flatter myself I am wise in my generation, I have sown my wild oats early in life, and, consequently, have already survived my romance. A vision of vulgar lodgings, hashed mutton,

an ill-dressed wife, and cutting my club, would draw me back from the precipice, if I were at the very edge — not to mention the necessity of really reading hard law, and begging for briefs, like a dancing dog asking for a bone. No, no ; it is a gentlemanly profession enough ; eating a term is all very well, and Barrister-at-law sounds passably after one's name, if strangers ask impertinent questions, and wonder who 's who. But I mean, my good mother, to live my life, not drudge it." As he spoke, he helped himself to olives, and replenished his glass. Mrs. Ridley faintly smiled her comments, and then added :—

" If you can obtain a good income, without working for it, I am sure I shall not blame you."

" Mr. Bowring quite approves of our waiting until my prospects are more settled ; which *entre nous* means, until a certain pale-faced youth is definitely discarded. As for Lydia, she is a woman 'in love' ; and that pretty

clearly expresses my influence over her. By the way, Mr. Bowring suggests, that our engagement be not talked about; as he says, we are both young, and may change our minds. Curious provision, is it not?"

Hitherto, Charlton Ridley had spoken more in the vein of one dissolute young man to another, than that of a son to his mother; but a recollection of certain wants and wishes from time to time obtruded itself on his mind, together with an opinion that this was a proper occasion to make them known; and so there was a gradual change of tone and manner—just as a skilful musician modulates from one key to another. Yet, rather clumsily, at last he burst upon the subject, avowing that he —— wanted money!

Mrs. Ridley's countenance fell, and her voice assumed that whining, self-compassionating tone, which, with her, was no unfrequent substitute for anger. Whenever Charlton began asking for money, his mother felt herself

engaged in a pitched battle; and though she was not always entirely worsted, she never came off quite unscathed—and she knew from the commencement that all her wits and wiles would be called into play by the encounter.

“I tell you I have not got it,” she exclaimed, in a voice between a sob and a moan; “I am sure, I wonder how you can ask me, or where you suppose I am to find one fifty pounds after another.”

For answer, Charlton only smiled—a half-incredulous, half-indignant smile.

“You may doubt what I say,” continued the lady; “but only remember the sums you have had from me during the last year.”

“I thought it was an understanding,” returned her son somewhat haughtily; “that, if I would but seem satisfied with my father’s allowance of two hundred a year, you would make up the difference of my requirements.”

“Yes, as far as a twenty-pound note, now

and then ; but not hundreds, which it seems to me you expect.

“ I can't live in London for less than I do. I'd rather go to Australia or Canada at once, cut my way through the back woods, and give up civilisation altogether, than I would live in London, and not in its world. Besides, how am I to play in the game of life for fortune and ease, without staking something? ”

The threat of going abroad, though an old trick, had not lost all its charm ; it was a great gun in the conflict, which always went off, carrying more or less weight. Besides, Mr. Ridley—who, though seemingly lethargic about the interests of his family, and a dull man in general, had some half dozen clear ideas and correct opinions in his mind, and was fully persuaded that his hopeful son, would never make his way honestly in the world, pushed by any slighter spur than the iron one of necessity. He had no faith in the accounts he heard of Charlton's law studies—and had

never thought him calculated for a learned profession. These opinions were well understood by the mother and son, nevertheless Mr. Ridley must have been stronger-minded, and more firm of purpose than he had ever shown himself, for his will to have overthrown theirs in the choice of Charlton's path of life; and yet every outbreak of extravagance, every proof that the taciturn dull old man was right, weakened their cause in some perceptible measure, and rendered new concessions more difficult to obtain. Mrs. Ridley knew, that absurd as in some respects, the idea of Charlton emigrating might seem, it was one exceedingly likely to be favoured by her husband.

It may naturally be asked, how did Mrs. Ridley command money to indulge her son in his extravagance, and "make up" his income? I can only explain by likening her to those creatures who work and burrow all their lives under ground—laying up their hoarded stores in their own mysterious manner. She had

saved and saved during the whole of her married life, both from her own private pin-money, and from a housekeeping allowance, which she took care should always be liberal; and these savings had multiplied themselves with that fascinating adroitness with which money usually germinates, until Mrs. Ridley had some tolerably considerable sums very profitably invested. Charlton had a shrewd suspicion of his mother's habits, but made the common mistake of believing a miser's hoards greater than they were. She was not a miser to him, however; she loved him after her nature, as a fox might love her cub, and instruct it in the morals of its kind; and the fruits of this vulpine rearing, are already tolerably apparent.

It was a drawn battle between mother and son that summer evening. He wanted eighty pounds, and she gave him forty; it being just worthy of notice, that though she had several new crisp ten pound notes in

her escritoir, she made up the sum with a “housekeeping cheque,” and some sovereigns from her pocket, not hesitating to declare, that she had not five pounds more in the house.

CHAP. X

THE PARSONAGE.

THE summer was waning ; the pure emerald green which had robed the earth in its early prime, had changed to a sere and darkened hue ; bright berries supplied the place of the year's first odorous blossoms—and though roses and lilies had sighed away their last faint breaths — their scentless successors, dahlias precise as honey-combs, clinging convolvuli, the late carnations, and other matron-looking flowers, shed a certain sedate beauty on garden scenery, not altogether to be despised. The bright slanting rays of the September sun shone into a pretty room, half study half parlour, in a pretty Parsonage House

situated only two or three miles from the coast of one of our south-eastern counties. A cheerful fire had been kindled for breakfast, but the sunshine, as if jealous of its prerogative, streamed full upon the grate, and with a flood of light subdued its rival.

At a table covered with books, drawings, and mathematical instruments, sat a studious youth—our old acquaintance Mark Bowring, now in his eighteenth year. He was rather above the medium height, slight in figure, yet not remarkably so; and was dressed in a lounging summer coat out of one shallow pocket of which peeped the corner of a book, not exactly belonging to his studies—a volume of Goldsmith's Essays. A black silk cravat was so loosely tied, that it gave full play to his movements, and showed the beautiful form of a throat of feminine fairness. The expression of his countenance was not altered—it was matured. His forehead was broad, and his rich abundant golden brown hair—

only a shade or two darker than in childhood, had a faint waving curl, and still grew thin on the temples. His eyes were still of the deepest blue—and still would have been characterised, as remarkable for their softness of expression; but as Mark's mind had expanded, a look of keen and clear intelligence mingled with the tenderness, and moreover the flush of perfect health and a certain massiveness of jaw gave manliness to his face. He was pursuing his studies with the earnest and absorbed attention of one whose mind had been disciplined to steady exertion. Presently an elderly man entered the room, and Mark instantly rose to draw an easy chair near to the table.

The Rev. Walter Greyson deserves a few words of introduction. His history was a common one; and, perhaps, even his fine character was less rare than is believed by those who look chiefly for greatness in high places: a gentleman's son with a patrimony

that only sufficed to complete his education, he had taken honors at Cambridge, and from the purest and most conscientious motives, had chosen the Church as a profession; nevertheless he had drudged on for twenty years, as a tutor, before a patron presented him with a small living. During a considerable portion of that probationary period he had been engaged to a portionless girl, who, worthy of his love, returned it undisguisedly. He had seen—but never noticed—time steal the bloom from her cheek, the girlish lightness from her step, and even press her sunny locks with his frosty hand, leaving the print in streaks of snow;—yet, when “passing rich” with two hundred pounds a year, at last they were wed, the love, the confidence, the unjaded hearts which were united at the altar, might well have rendered them objects of envy to myriads of the young, the rich, and the beautiful.

Observers of social life will acknowledge that

childless couples, who have married late, quite as frequently realise what is called the romance of married life, as any others. Such marriages have generally been preceded by cares, and struggles, and loneliness, which present a forceful contrast to the blessedness of a happy home; and, moreover, very frequently the prolonged singleness has arisen from some granite of integrity in the characters, which is the only real foundation for domestic happiness.

Such a couple were Mr. Greyson, and his gentle wife. People sometimes smiled at the little lover-like attentions which passed between them, and the emphatic "my dearest!" by which they frequently called each other; but it would be well if the world could count more hearths by which ill-temper has never sat—more homes, into which discord has never entered—for every one is a sun that sheds the light of its influence and example in a wide circle. Such was the home in which it had been Mark Bowring's happy privilege to

be domesticated for nearly three years. Nor was simple goodness the only charm which reigned there. Religious, without being the bigot to a sect; versed in the history of the past, to draw from it wise lessons for the present; possessing the erudition of a classical scholar, yet dearly loving the grand literature of recent and present times, Mr. Greyson was a man far in advance of the popular mind; and through his introduction, Mark Bowring had already become acquainted with the Thoughts of the great Thinkers, the books which may be the primers of another generation.

Before he was placed with Mr. Greyson, more than one description of school had been tried; yet, it happened that Mark's progress in his studies had not appeared sufficiently decided and rapid, fully to satisfy Mr. Bowring; at least, when brought into comparison with the success of Charlton Ridley at the same age. The sensitive nature—the fine and spiritual mind—which, soaring into regions very often

quite beyond the teacher's ken, chafing at school tasks, and flying at knowledge instead of creeping up the pathway—very seldom carries off the school prizes, is very rarely at all comprehended by the coarser clay set in authority over it. In the world, and in every miniature reflex of it, the momentary victory is, to the strong, animal nature—not unallied, of course, to mental vigour, but not mastered by it; and it would be amusing, if it were not sad, to observe how commonly great men have been called dull boys; or their faculties only suspected, in childhood, by some one doting relative, whose love has struck the rock, and made the waters flow. As plants can only blossom in a genial atmosphere, so are there minds which only expand when warmed by affection. Mr. Greyson had been led to expect in his pupil, a backward boy, of ordinary capacity and character; what he had found, events will sufficiently show.

A few days before the autumn morning, of

which I write, it had been definitely known that his pupil was to return "home," as Stoneleigh was still called, preparatory perhaps to his going to college, or, perhaps, as a final close to the professed course of his education. It was not to be concealed, that Mark had seriously displeased his father by the positive expression of his repugnance to enter the army; and yet Mr. Greyson sympathised so much with his pupil's predilections, and so sincerely respected his straightforward candour, that he could not blame the firmness with which they had been shown. It was less a regular lesson that Mark was now receiving, than a revision going on of the last year's studies; in another week he was to quit the Parsonage, and a good deal of desultory conversation mingled with the graver discourse.

"If you had but stayed until Christmas," said Mr. Greyson, laying his hand on a volume of Sophocles, "we should have leisurely finished another perusal of our old Greek friend.

Well, well, it can't be helped—and I am not ashamed, my dear boy, of dismissing you even now." Nevertheless, it must be owned that Mr. Greyson was too thorough a scholar himself, to be puffed up with the amount of knowledge he had instilled into his young friend's mind. None could know better than he, how much further progress was yet to be made; but, for the same reason, he completely appreciated that which Mark had really achieved, and which, thanks to his more than ordinary talents, his steady application, and real love of knowledge, was marvellous for his age.

"Your praise, dear sir," replied Mark, "you well know, is always my most delightful reward. Yet, to own the truth, I fear I have hardly heart, or head just now, to master any difficulty—I suspect I must make holiday until I leave you."

"You shall do just as you like," said Mr. Greyson; and he continued, "Ah, how we

shall miss you! And winter coming on, too, with its long evenings, to recall the pleasant readings of last year. Come in, my Lucy," he added, as Mrs. Greyson tapped at the door, "we are doing so little, that you cannot interrupt us."

And so Mrs. Greyson brought in her work-basket, and seated herself near the sunny window; but first she held out her hand to Mark—for being in delicate health, she was not an early riser—and this was their morning greeting. It was a small white hand, and with the playful gallantry, and half-disguised affection of a son to his mother, Mark raised it to his lips.

It may be, such details are trite, and unworthy of being remembered; and yet the fluttering of the idle pennon of an anchored ship shows what breeze is ready to fill the sails, and waft the vessel across the ocean; and I would strive to show the influence domestic happiness had had in developing Mark's natural

affectionateness of disposition, and forming a few very important opinions. A thing may sometimes be described by depicting its opposites. I conscientiously believe that a common school is, to many children, little better than a pandemonium, constructed with unconscious ingenuity, but of a kind that might have been expected, if servants of the Inquisition had been employed to punish juvenile heretics. Combining causes produce the bleak, mental atmosphere, which seems so curiously in keeping with the bare walls, the hard benches, the straight tables, the carpetless floors; as if some spirit of ugliness had been summoned to slay the first tender perceptions of the beautiful in a child's mind—those perceptions which are not unfrequently like the first unfolding of the butterfly's wings, which are to bear it upward to its loftier existence.

At such schools, learning is made a punishment and not a privilege; and, to render it so, free enquiry is checked, and a slavish obedience

inculcated. The eagle and the dove are caged together, and disciplined alike! Fear banishes love; selfishness and suspicion arise, born of various parents; the government is tyranny, and the violence of the rebel, and the vices of the coward are begotten accordingly. And, by and bye, these misruled children are the men and women of another day, and form a World, they themselves condemn, like to their childhood's model! Curious is it to observe, that those finer creatures who have been spared such contamination, or have been too strong for its influence, are the ones who have most faith in humanity; who are the slowest to think evil; the least suspicious of their fellows, and the readiest to perceive and bring to light the "soul of good" in all things!

It was the opposite of these conditions I have deprecated, which for the last three years Mark Bowring had experienced; and consequently his natural character had developed, its weak points having been strengthened, and

its innate nobility cherished and directed by Mr. Greyson's paternal care. No doubt the charlatan worldling, who, always seeking for crooked paths, rarely sees a straight one, would have thought Mark Bowring entirely undisciplined to enter on "life." With a woman's tenderness of heart, he had a woman's bravery of endurance, yet, "double-natured," a man's courage for action. Honour, truth, sincerity, were part of his being ; regulating it as unconsciously as beats a healthy pulse. Self-reliant was he, yet without vanity ; and again, unconsciously ; for self-knowledge comes of fair comparison, as well as self-examination, and we must mix intimately with our fellows before we can put them into the scale. Ignorant of so much, no wonder therefore that a worldling would have despised him, and looked on him at his entrance into life, as an unarmed soldier rushing forward to the conflict. Yet the invulnerability of Achilles was not a visible armour !

CHAP. XI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE DISCOVERED, AND A
NEW ONE MADE.

I HAVE said, that the Parsonage House of—, was situated about three miles from the coast; and here was quickly growing up, one of those little semi-rural sea-side towns which almost girdle England. Chosen retreats of wealthy invalids; for children periodically escaped from metropolitan or provincial towns, and teachers; and not unfrequently places selected for their brief repose by those brain-workers who shrink—as a tired eye does from light—from the glare and din and restless routine of a fashionable watering-place—workers, who when they take Holiday want Rest. Dear to many hearts

are these little towns, unique as a class ; with their one post-office, and one library ; one grand hotel ; one "fly" and donkey-chaise proprietor ; one bathing establishment ; or if rival claimants to public patronage, in any of these departments have at intervals appeared, a short contest has almost always terminated in the overthrow of the weaker combatant, and a return to monopoly ; the condition of an infant state being certainly the one in which despotism of any sort is the most tolerable.

The walk to Shinglebay — so let us call the place I mean — was a very favourite one with Mark Bowring. He knew a shorter road than along the dusty highway ; a road which took him through corn fields, and by the side of gardens to the edge of the chalk cliff, which he skirted for a few hundred yards, and then came abruptly, at last, on the cluster of dwellings which lay in their sheltered nook. He had finished his desultory studies, put away his books, and written to his father, making final

arrangements for his return home ; and now he resolved to visit Shinglebay, partly to discharge two or three trifling accounts he owed, and partly—for it might be, he should not see it again—to take a mute farewell of the spot where he had passed many happy hours.

It was a lovely day ; and as Mark came in sight of the ocean, glittering in the sunshine, and heaving as gently as if its undulations were the breathings of sleep, he felt as if the mighty waters were something dear and familiar, from which he was loth to part. In the deep silence, broken only by the sounds of nature, he heard the advancing waves lash the pebbly beach, and then, with mock-retreating and mimic roar, surge back, as if to gather new strength for another bound. The volume of Goldsmith was still in his pocket, and a lounge on the beach with such a companion, seemed full of delightful promise. In the cliff, there had been cut a steep zig-zag flight of steps, and Mark had descended about half way, when he

came upon a group for which he was somewhat prepared, by having heard the children's voices before any one was visible.

The juvenile members of the party were thorough little rebels ; none of them exceeded nine, or ten years of age ; and, if the truth must be told, the two younger ones of the four were the more tractable. The others, wooden spade in hand, with children's wilful ways, and noisy voices, insisted on returning to the little strip of sand where they had been digging ; but they were told it was dinner-time, and one was held tight by the hand, and dragged up the steps by an elderly woman neatly dressed in black silk, and who looked what she was, a respectable nurse—and the other urchin was conducted in a similar manner, though with more words of gentle persuasion, by a girl of about sixteen or seventeen years of age. Her dress, instead of silk, was of cheap mousseline-de-laine — yet of a small, well-chosen pattern ; her coarse straw bonnet was

of a close shape, with only a plain blue ribbon across it: and a black scarf, which had been almost dragged from her in the needful conflict with her little pupil, was by this chance disorder draped most becomingly around her slight figure. It was by no means the costume that a "belle" would have chosen; yet there was an air of grace about this young girl which at once proclaimed her the gentlewoman. Mark could not at this moment see her face, for her head was turned aside, and bent down while expostulating with the little boy. The elderly woman did not at first observe a stranger; but when she looked up, as Mark, with his hat in his hand, stood in a recess of the cliff for them to pass, she started, uttered something more like a shriek than any other human sound, let go the hand of the child — who, startled by her behaviour into obedience, made no attempt to run away — and clasping Mark's arm, with a grasp that almost pained him, she exclaimed—

"Mark!—my Boy! Mark Bowring! it is—
it is."

Mark's recognition of her was something slower; and yet it was not many seconds before her hand was grasped in both of his, and he cried in a joyful tone.

"Morris!—my dear good nurse Morris that I shall love for ever;" and as he stooped to kiss her wrinkled cheek, she burst into a torrent of joyful tears.

"My dear Mossy," continued Mark, "you must tell me where you are living, and what you are doing. I must come and see you, and you must come and see me."

"This is not quite the place to talk in," said Morris "with this little party around us. Ah, Miss Armitage," she continued, "I see those naughty children are quite too much for you."

"O no; they are going to be good," was the reply in a voice of singular sweetness; "they have almost promised to go home quietly with me, and leave nurse to follow presently."

“Ah, but Miss Ruth, I want you a minute ;” and, as she spoke, she looked up in Mark’s face with a questioning smile.

He had been struck with the name of Armitage, and now he said, in an under tone, “Tell me, Morris, who is that young lady ; did I hear aright the same name as my mother’s.”

“Yes,” said Morris, “the same name ; and Ruth Armitage is the daughter of your mother’s cousin, that second cousin who went abroad to make a fortune which he won and lost ; and who now has not been heard of for three years. It is a long story—but shake hands with your cousin.”

What an introduction for two youthful relatives ! Distant ones, indeed, yet not seeming so ; for Ruth was an only child, and save that strange neglectful father, Mark was the nearest of her kindred ; while he, brotherless indeed, felt that he had not quite a sister. And now that he looked into her face holding her hand, and calling her “cousin,”

her beauty, not radiant, not dazzling, seemed to him exactly the countenance of his mother, such as he had pictured it from tradition,—for no portrait of Mrs. Bowring existed. That fair face, with faint pink color, and the soft deep blue eyes, that met his own unshrinkingly, recalled some dream which he had dreamed long ago;—only Ruth's rich brown hair was many shades darker than a lock of his mother's, which he fondly cherished. But this was well; for it gave an individuality to "cousin Ruth," which perhaps she would otherwise have wanted.

Meanwhile Master Adolphus, and Miss Eveline Patterson, though partially awed by a stranger's presence, were from time to time more or less obstreperous; and Mark cordially agreed that the present was not the time or place for confidential conversation. But he took down the address, at Shinglebay, which Morris gave him, with great exactness, and promised that she and his cousin should

hear from him very shortly. He had a project in his head which turned his steps homeward without so much as taking one stroll on the sandy beach.

In less than an hour, Mark, seated between Mr. and Mrs. Greyson, was relating, in animated tones, the encounter of the morning, dwelling fondly on his recollections of dear old nurse, and declaring that it was a delightful thing to have discovered a cousin, when he scarcely knew that he had such a relation.

Now one of the most charming characteristics of the vicar and his wife, was their freedom from that cold, narrow, worldly suspiciousness, which infests common natures and checks every kindly impulse. They believed Nurse Morris to be the excellent, affectionate creature which Mark described; and they felt a sort of tender interest in the young cousin, who was so evidently occupying some dependent position.

“What a pity you did not meet them a week

or two ago," said Mrs. Greyson ; "however, I hope they are not going to leave Shinglebay just yet, that I may have an opportunity of showing the young lady some attention."

"My love," exclaimed the vicar, "I should recommend you to lose no time in calling upon her—evidently she is not her own mistress, and may not be able to come the first day you name ; of course, it would gratify her infinitely more to visit us while Mark is here, than after his departure."

"Dear, kind friends ! " said Mark, "this is the very thing I was going to ask of you. And pray," he added, with a smile, "let dear Mossy be included in the invitation."

"Of course—of course," replied Mrs. Greyson ; and so we will hurry dinner—and whatever cook says to the contrary, have something prepared in half an hour. Then the four-wheel chaise must be ready ; Mr. Bowring shall drive me to Shinglebay, and I hope my name will be a sufficient passport and

introduction to this Mrs. Patterson. Who knows, if she is good-natured, perhaps she will let me bring back one, or both, of the visitors to tea."

In the country, there are few ladies looked up to with so much respect, as is a clergyman's wife ; and Mrs. Patterson, who ate, drank, and slept—dressed, talked, and walked—according to the most orthodox conventionality, was "charmed" at receiving a visit from the vicar's lady. True, she regretted that the reception was not in her own gaudy, dusty, London drawing-room ; but she tried, by her pathetic lamentations over the wretchedness of "furnished houses"—the one she occupied was, however, the best in Shinglebay—to convey an impression of the grandeur she relinquished for the sake of marine advantages. Mrs. Greyson had scarcely dared to hope that head-nurse and governess could be spared together ; but Mrs. Patterson, in her extreme obligingness, even suggested that they should go on the same

occasion—"that day, certainly, as Mrs. Greyson's 'carriage' was so convenient to take them. The under-nurse, with her own assistance, could manage the children perfectly well for one evening."

If we look at the action only by its consequence and its seeming, it was really good-natured of Mrs. Patterson, thus to give holiday to two of her most useful dependents, and so Mrs. Greyson thought it; but, judged more strictly, it wanted the divine essence of generosity—self-denial! She remembered the day's duties were nearly over—and she dearly loved praise and thanks, when they were to be obtained without a sacrifice. She even distinctly calculated on the extra services she might conveniently demand on the strength of Morris and Ruth's gratitude.

Few, terribly few of the spoilt children of prosperity, know even the ring of the true metal of generosity! They give, from their abundance, money after their own wants are supplied;

garments too worn or too old-fashioned for their use : time, which perhaps hangs listlessly on their hands ; and the recording angels turn mournfully away, and seek the haunts of the poor and the struggling—of penury that shares its little— of the busy struggling, who, like swimmers against the tide, yet save and help the sinking.

Morris only asked time to don her very best black silk, and pin in paper her very best cap ; Ruth Armitage smoothed her ringlets, and changed the mousseline-de-laine for a simple white muslin, and then the vicar's old horse trotted merrily homeward with his very happy burthen. It was a delightful evening—such tea Mrs. Greyson made, and such cakes had her cook improvised for the occasion, that Morris talked of the same for weeks afterwards, bringing all other eatables and drinkables into comparison with those superlatives. The good nurse was a parlour guest, and sat in an easy chair ; Mark handing her the tea, and drawing

a little table near her. Mr. Greyson put aside his learning and his divinity, and talked to her long and kindly, and Mrs. Greyson lent one of her own shawls to protect her from the cold, when at last the parting hour had arrived, and the old horse had again to trot to Shingle-bay. Poor Morris was never made so much of in her life ; she told innumerable anecdotes of Mark's childhood, and cried and laughed in turn ; be it observed, reflecting that Mr. and Mrs. Greyson were the most perfect "gentle-folks" in the world.

Ruth Armitage, though naturally graceful, was a little shy at first ; but Mrs. Greyson possessed the exquisite charm of sympathy which most surely sets strangers at their ease ; and before the evening was over, Ruth felt as if she were talking to some dearer friend than any she had yet known. She did not obtrude her sad and simple history, yet somehow it came out, that she hardly remembered her parents. Her mother had died when

she was little beyond infancy, and her father had been absent from England for many years. He had placed her at school; and for a long time, she believed, his payments had been regular; at last they ceased—the letters of the schoolmistress remained unanswered—no money was forthcoming; and homeless, friendless, Ruth had begun thus early the battle of life, grateful for the education she had received, and already, out of the poor pittance of twenty-five pounds a year, she had commenced by small instalments to discharge the debt by which she had benefited.

By and bye the piano was opened, and Ruth both played and sang with taste and skill. She could have instructed in accomplishments which are usually well paid for; but who would give a high salary to so young a teacher? Verily, Mrs. Patterson had made a good bargain.

Mark, with the clear, strong, mental vision which arose from his own truthful nature,

unspoiled by conventional falsities, was interested in his cousin; and even in comparing her with his beautiful and accomplished sister, she did not sink into shadow. He begged Mrs. Greyson not to lose sight of her after he was gone; but she replied, with a sigh—

“I am sorry to say, Mrs. Patterson and her family leave Shinglebay next week.”

CHAP. XII.

THE RETURN HOME.

IT was with many mingled feelings that Mark Bowring came in sight of Stoneleigh. True, he was no stranger to “home”; all through his boyhood he had paid holiday visits there, once or twice a year; but there was something in the manner of this final return that jarred upon his feelings, and dashed with apprehension what ought to have been pleasant emotions. The carriage—a low phæton—was sent to meet him at the railway station, but only in charge of a servant; to be sure, the station was seven miles distant, and a ride of fourteen miles might be more than either Lydia, or his father, desired. Then, he remembered that Mr.

Bowring hated railroads, and all their levelling tendencies, and had he come to meet him, would probably have been loud in lamentation for the good old times, when stage coaches brought visitors to the post town, within three miles of Stoneleigh. And so he grew reconciled to his solitary ride, and as he rolled along, made excellent resolutions to be obedient to his father, whenever obedience would not run counter to certain principles of his mind, which seem to him derived from a higher than human authority. Perhaps, too, he speculated a little on the reception with which he should meet.

It is curious, however, to observe, that when we are driven to conjectures on any subject, just and accurate as our general conclusions may be, we very rarely can define the details which are to justify them. Thus Mark was not quite prepared to find Charlton Ridley established at Stoneleigh, on a footing that seemed distinctly different from that of the most intimate and familiar guest; a footing that seemed

to jostle Mark himself out of his place, and cause an unavoidable constraint between them.

As the phæton passed down the long avenue leading to the house, the old trees, which interlaced their branches over head, dropped their dead leaves in a shower upon Mark as the autumn breeze moaned and rustled through them. It was late in the afternoon—the fineness of the day was over—and, somewhat chilled by his ride, a sensation of gloom came over him that was almost allied to sadness. He fancied, but was not quite sure, that he discerned Lydia's face at one of the library windows; but only her dog Sparkle, his gift, appeared to welcome him in the hall. A servant ushered him into the old library; and, as Lydia was seated at some feminine employment in the embrasure of a window, probably his conjecture had been right.

At a table, placed nearer to the fire, were Mr. Bowring and Charlton Ridley, the former dictating to his young companion, who, from all appearances had been writing several letters.

"How do you do, Mark?—how do you do? You must be cold after your ride, come to the fire," was the common-place greeting of Mr. Bowring, as he only half rose from his chair, and extended his hand. Lydia had thrown down her work; did not shrink from her brother's embrace; returned his kiss; and the heart of Mark thrilled at believing, that she, at least, was glad to see him. Charlton Ridley grasped his hand, with that friendly fervour, which is so easily assumed; but his speech was less fluent than usual. He was startled at recognising the change, which the last two years had effected in Mark Bowring. He was not prepared for the frank, yet thorough-bred, and manly bearing which he recognised; boyhood was clearly passed, and instead of a stripling's insignificance, there was something in the brow, and in the eye, and even in the height of Mark Bowring, which almost equalled his own—that told him this was no contemptible adversary at the game he was playing.

“Lydia must talk to you for a quarter of an hour,” said Mr. Bowring to his son; “I want to get off by the post, some letters which Charlton is good enough to write for me.”

Mark obeyed the hint; seated himself near his sister, and, as I have before observed, the deep embrasures of the windows almost formed separate little chambers — though thoroughly warmed by the large fire which was burning — so that the low confidential dictation of Mr. Bowring was only partially overheard by his son. Mark, however, did observe that Charlton was not a mere automaton amanuensis; but that he frequently made remarks, and apparently suggestions with regard to his employment.

“I hope it is not illness,” whispered Mark to his sister, “which induces my father to employ another hand for his correspondence.”

“O no; not now. But cousin Charlton has been here a good deal lately, and a few weeks ago, papa had a slight attack of gout in

his hand, during which time Charlton wrote all his letters, and he proved so clever with his pen, that I fancy, though his hand is quite well now, papa is always pleased to have his services."

"I hope mine may be equally acceptable, whenever they are required."

"You see, Charlton's knowledge of the law, gives him such an advantage," continued Lydia; "for I am sorry to say, papa has got into some disagreeable disputes lately. I don't understand the particulars, but I am afraid he will be obliged to give in; and that we shall have a horrid railway through the park."

"Horrid railway, sister! why call it 'horrid'?" And then ensued between brother and sister, a *sotto voce* and courteous argument, which however would be very trite to repeat in eighteen hundred and fifty-two. Mark was sorry to find his sister, who felt and understood so well the poetry of nature, dull at tracing the stirring associations, to which Science has already given

birth, much less to follow out its “crescent promise.”

The letters were despatched, and the dinner hour soon arrived; but the meal passed off somewhat heavily. In disposition Mark was the reverse of jealous, or self-important; yet he could not banish the suspicion, strive as he would, that his presence was a restraint to his companions. Moreover, he was either being treated still as a child, or a marked slight had been passed on him, and sanctioned by his father.

For years, Lydia had taken the head of her father's table, and done the honours with easy grace. Recently it appeared, Mr. Bowring had vacated the seat opposite to her — perhaps at the same time, and for the same reason that he chose an amanuensis — and Mark beheld the place quietly, and as a matter of course filled by Charlton Ridley. The circumstance took him so much by surprise, that he had not time by word or movement, to offer himself as the

proper substitute, at the proper time; and no good opportunity occurred that day for his doing so.

No hint had been given Mark Bowring of his sister's engagement to her cousin; but during this first family meal, the truth flashed upon him. It was the only clue by which he could explain everything he saw around him; the perfect understanding which evidently existed between his father and Charlton; the faint blush and slight hesitation which he had detected when Lydia mentioned her cousin's prolonged visits; a tremor in her voice, when she spoke to Charlton Ridley, and on his part an easy confidence, that had more of a husband's calm surety, than the anxious assiduity of a lover. Mark had none of that knowledge of the world which adepts of society catch on the surface of the stream — knowledge that is of little real value, and is constantly misapplied, because it is the observation of results that are never traced to their causes. But he had the

student's better knowledge, that of his own heart, and though this was a mirror that reflected dark things but faintly, and showed many fair ones which he would less often meet in life—the picture was still human nature, with its moving springs, and many mysteries; and the lesson the sum of all that philosophers can teach. Not to be wholly acquired, if the impulse be not innate, is this spiritual knowledge, though it may be cultivated by the will, or fatally dulled by selfishness. Its best name is Sympathy, though we call it genius, talent, common sense, and give it twenty other titles, according to the point from which it is viewed. By it the poet anatomises a passion he has never felt; the actor embodies to-night a Lear, to-morrow a Macbeth; the judge rives the soul of the culprit, by laying bare the secret springs of the suspected crime; and in private ordinary life we find some one in a family possessing it, who is for ever appealed to, for ever relied on; the friend of the lowly, the

counsellor, or, at lowest, the trusted servant of the mighty. Withal he may be less learned in the material show of learning than his companions; but he has the heart's electric sympathy, and this is knowledge of human nature.

It was by this knowledge, that Mark saw something to regret in Charlton Ridley's calm self-assured manner. He had no vulgar ambition for Lydia to marry to rank or riches; but he would have wished his sister to be fondly loved, and deeply reverenced, to be worshipped even with a lover's venial idolatry. Had love been a subject of discussion, he would have borne idle jests at his opinions; for he knew by the echoes of his own heart, that the Poets are the world's great truth-tellers!

The evening was somewhat gayer than the dinner hour. Mark resolved to shake off grave thoughts and speculations; for it was not the time to expect his father's or his sister's confidence; and so he started several subjects of

conversation, more general ones than might have been expected on the occasion of such a meeting. He spoke well too, and in a slight discussion showed Charlton Ridley to be wrong in his premises; and once or twice Mr. Bowring looked at him with a glance that seemed to say—

“After all, I may be proud of my son.”

And when they parted for the night, he shook hands with Mark more warmly than he had done at their meeting a few hours before.

“Father,” said Mark, “will you give me an hour or two to-morrow morning? What time may I come to you?”

“O any time in the morning—I am afraid I know all you have to say—good night—good night.”

CHAP. XIII. •

FATHER AND SON—HARD WORDS.

THE important interview at last took place. Mark was a shade paler than usual, but his manner was firm and collected, and his voice did not once quail. Mr. Bowring leaned his arm upon the table, and from time to time rapped his knuckles against it, with a gesture indicative of a perturbed temper, and also—that the gout had entirely left his hand.

“ You will not force me, father,” said Mark, “ into a profession, for which I have so decided a distaste?”

“ Say, contempt,” replied Mr. Bowring, bitterly.

“ No, father; not contempt. I applaud the

brave soldier—provided always that he be a merciful Christian man—with an admiration that is proportioned to the wonder I feel at his life. But I look on his condition as a dreadful necessity, and have no sympathy with his career, and no ambition for his glories."

"Ambition! you have no ambition of any sort, I think. Perhaps you would like to loll away existence as a fine gentleman: but I have no fortune to give you for such indulgence, I can tell you."

"Try me, before you so taunt me," said Mark; "try me in some path for which my capacity and inclination fit me."

"The navy?"

"There the same objections exist which dis-incline me for the army; with some additional ones."

"The church? I might make interest to get you a tolerable living?"

"Once—not very long ago—that was my boyish dream; but I have lived to shudder at

my presumption. Youth is not the proper season for that most solemn undertaking; my own character is too little formed, my own opinions are too crude, my own weaknesses too many, for me to feel myself fit for a spiritual guide."

"I wish one of your weaknesses were a ready obedience to my wishes."

"Father, for 'obedience,' use the right word — sacrifice."

"Sir, you are impertinent."

"I wish not to be so; but it is time the truth were spoken between us. Were your life, your fame, your fortune, to be only preserved by the loss of mine, the altar should have its victim. But the sacrifice of a whole life, of a human destiny, is too much for a parent to demand for the satisfaction of a caprice, or an opinion. It has long appeared to me to be one of the Creator's most immutable laws, that we are to work out His decrees by the means which He has given us. He performs

no miracles but the perpetual miracle of life which we see around us; but He gives us a mortal frame, an immortal soul, and, according to their capabilities and suitabilities, is our 'work' to be 'found' and 'done.' We sin grievously when, for sordid temptations, or foolish conventionalisms, we reject the spiritual dictates of our own soul."

"Absolute sceptic, and would-be philosopher!" ejaculated Mr. Bowring, in a tone of angry irony.

"I am too humble to be a sceptic, and too ignorant to be a philosopher," sighed Mark; and, as he spoke, shading his face with his hand to hide the strong emotion which was betraying itself on his countenance, just as a coming storm ruffles the calm waters.

"For what are you fit?" asked Mr. Bowring abruptly, and pushing back his chair with vehemence.

"I fear, for little that is great, at present;" and now Mark Bowring's voice was husky with

suppressed feeling. "But I had believed and hoped that from your fortune, your position, I might claim further opportunities of study and improvement; and when I am of age—yes, this is my high, daring ambition—I would, by the people's suffrage, represent them in the British Parliament, and devote all the energies of my manhood to serve them truly. Let them honor their trusty soldiers; and yet I would try to keep for them the holiness of peace. I may not be a minister of God, but I would help to lead the people to the feet of more worthy teachers. To lighten the burden of the oppressed; to pull down tyranny and monopoly from their strongholds; to rend the thick curtains of ignorance; to strive for an Utopia, with a thorough consciousness that it is not to be won, as a marksman aiming at the blinding sun, may still pierce an eagle on the wing: these are my desires. My ambition is to be a labourer, however humble, in the great cause of social and political reform."

“Democrat!” groaned Mr. Bowring; “that I should live to call my son by such a name! My only son, I had almost said—I had forgotten, in my disappointment, that I have another son —a better and dearer.”

“I understand,” said Mark, mournfully; “and perhaps I ought already to have congratulated my sister on her choice, and you on your acquisition. But —,” and Mark Bowring paused.

“But what, Sir? Finish your sentence.”

“Since you insist on the truth—but that, Charlton Ridley can be no brother to me.”

“May be not,” said Mr. Bowring, and his small eyes flashed with indignant scorn, “may be not; I should almost despise him if he could feel himself of kin to anything so contemptible as the pert boy I see before me. But mark me, Sir,” and by this time the weak old man had fanned his wrath to a concentrated fury, “mark me, Sir; all insolent speech of Charlton Ridley, I consider insolence

to me; all disrespect towards him, is disrespect to me. Yes, you had better go; I have borne enough from you, I think."

Mark had risen, and was leaning against the tall old-fashioned, white marble chimney piece, his cheeks, and even his lips, almost emulating its hue. Strange, that at that moment, the Memories should knock at his heart, and gush, as it were like a crowd of fays, athwart his mind! The shrill note of the old clock, as it ticked with its monotonous sound, seemed chattering of his childish days; the glancing sunbeam, streaking a certain corner of the room, had its tale to tell; the books ranged in their long-accustomed order, theirs — even the mute inanimate furniture seemed endowed with voices: while conjoined with these lightning recollections, were dim presentiments of the future, which though dim, seemed clear enough to be knowledge. It is fabled, that the drowning have, in the last seconds of existence, the whole of life

thus arrayed as in a map before them ; but I believe there are sometimes crises in our fate, far removed from death, or mortal danger in which something very similar transpires. Above all, Mark Bowring felt, rather than saw, that his father was in the coils of a serpent, from which his filial hand was at present powerless to rescue him.

The flash of these emotions, which yet takes so many words to describe, was but momentary ; and he answered Mr. Bowring's last rebuke by saying, "I will leave you if I am dismissed ; but I was not going. I have much to say still, and of another than myself, one in whom I had hoped to interest you."

"O you are demagogue enough already, I suppose, to have hangers-on."

The bitterness such words might have engendered, seemed melted in the heart of Mark, to pure compassion for his father, and he continued—

"I am too friendless, too powerless to have

dependants. It was for a deserted orphan, who, it seems to me, has some claim on your protection, as my heart tells me that she has on mine, that I wished to awaken your kindness; for a young relative of my mother's whom I have accidentally met." And partly from the real interest, which he felt in Ruth Armitage, but chiefly because he considered it his duty to apprise Mr. Bowring of her position, he commenced a brief narrative of her history.

It might be that a mere allusion to his lost wife aroused his tenderest feelings; at all events Mr. Bowring shrank from the discourse, as if he dreaded the infection of Mark's generous suggestions.

"Stay — stay," he continued, with the cowardice of a nature not hard-hearted, but which shrank from all contemplation of distress, — "let me hear no more, I beg; or if you must tell this long story, repeat it to your sister, and she will inform me of whatever it is

necessary I should know. After all, this young person is a very distant relation — I cannot see that she has any right to set forth a claim" —

"Father," interrupted Mark, "she makes no claim. Let me repeat, the meeting was accidental; and I only ask you to relieve her from her burthening debt, as my own request, and with the desire that you deduct the sum, by degrees, from whatever you purpose to allow me,"

"You seem, then, confidently to expect an allowance," said Mr. Bowring, with irony; then seeing Mark was about to speak, he motioned him to be silent, and continued: "I cannot endure these discussions—they shatter me—they make me ill. I am resolved—so understand me—that henceforth all you have to say shall come through your sister or Charlton. They know my views; and they can tell me what you say without repeating your impertinence, and rousing my indignation as you have done. Go, sir; you can go."

"A mediator between father and son!" exclaimed Mark, indignantly; and now roused to anger, and fairly stamping his foot.

"I have said it. Go, go."

But the revulsion of feeling quickly came; and, with tears in his eyes, Mark laid his hand on his father's shoulder. Mr. Bowring attempted to shake it off, but the grasp of the youth was too firm.

"I go," said Mark; "but hear me, father. The day will come when you will recall me to your confidence, with bitterer tears than those I now am shedding; and in that hour I will come; and, whatever the wrong you may have done me—whatever the scorn you may have heaped—I will come to comfort, console—aye, and to advise you—to ask your blessing and to bless you." He lifted his hand—he quitted the room—and then hurrying to his own chamber, buried his face in the pillows—drove back to his heart the evidences of its anguish, and gained strength by silent communing with his own soul.

That day, at the dinner-hour, Mark Bowring laid his hand on the back of the chair placed at the bottom of the table, and, waiting till his father was seated, prepared to take that place; but Mr. Bowring prevented the action, hastily exclaiming—

“Charlton, why do you not take the bottom of the table, as usual?”

Mark bowed, and verily remembered his father’s words, that “disrespect to Charlton Ridley was disrespect to him!”

CHAP. XIV.

A SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT.

MARK BOWRING rose the next morning with a more cheerful spirit than might have been expected. It is when the mind is torn by indecision ; when craven fears, rising from every point of the compass, toss it hither and thither —when shallow advisers preach their heathen gospel of present expediency —that the soul, still struggling to be true to itself, suffers its acutest agony. The strength of a firm right purpose once achieved beyond the danger of faltering, the powers of endurance become marvellous. Thus Mark had resolved, that every slight from Charlton Ridley, short of personal insult, he would endure patiently, yet with no

mean servility that could be misconstrued; that, in the limited intercourse with his father which seemed prescribed, he would avoid all irritating topics, though without compromising his expressed opinions; and that, at any rate, he would accept his sister as a mediator. There was no terror to him in this arrangement; for though he could not be said to know Lydia with all a brother's intimacy, he had a beautiful ideal of a sister's tenderness and loving influence; and this ideal dazzled his eyes whenever any slight reality presented itself to oppose this belief. And so it came to pass, that he took the earliest opportunity of repeating to her the history of Ruth Armitage.

“I will ask Papa to let me invite her here,” she exclaimed, all the kind feelings of her nature gushing forth. “Poor girl, how much I feel for her! So young—to be thrust forth on the world; why, I who am years her senior, feel that I should sink, fall to the earth, like that poor neglected honey-suckle”—they were

walking in the garden at the time—"if I had not something to uphold me, some one to advise and protect."

"Adversity is a keen wind," said Mark, "but a bracing one. Lydia, I thank you from my heart for the kind interest you take in my poor little cousin. Yet I doubt if she could prudently accept your invitation when offered: the service I most wish my father to render her is the very delicate one of presenting her with money; that school-debt must be a heavy burthen; it seems even unjust that it should be added to the bitterness of her lot."

"Papa is not fond of parting with money," said Lydia; "and I believe, in honest truth, has very little to spare. I wish I had it to give, or to lend you; but I am terribly poor just now. I have not—that is, when I have paid something which I have to pay—I shall not have five pounds till my dividends in January."

"Dividends!" the word reminded him of what had scarcely ever occurred to him, that

Lydia enjoyed, in her mother's right, the interest of about five thousand pounds—a pleasant amount for a young lady's pin money. He almost wondered how she came to be so "poor," living in the quiet manner in which she had done; but he answered most truly when he said—

"My dearest sister, I never dreamed of asking you for assistance."

"Perhaps not; but I am sure, Mark, a few months ago, when I had more money than I knew what to do with, I should have been delighted to give you fifty pounds, or more, for such a purpose. Be sure of this, I will try to coax Papa to send her a present."

Perhaps under other circumstances Mark might, in playful railly, have quizzed Lydia for her extravagance, or enquired what finery had lately proved so terribly expensive; but the consciousness that her for whom he was pleading was of no kin to the half-sister—this distinction of half-sister being one which

Mrs. Ridley had from their childhood taken care to enforce—chained his tongue, and he only warmly and affectionately reiterated his thanks for her promises; and dwelt, it might be, on the pathetic circumstances of Ruth's position.

Presently, Charlton Ridley joined them, and not quite ignorant of the proverbial belief, that lovers desire no company so much as that of each other, Mark sauntered away down a different walk. He did not, however, return to the house, but, after a while, threw himself on a rustic bench that was sheltered and almost hidden by luxuriant evergreens. Stretched his full length, he leaned his elbow on the seat, and his head on his hand. He had abundant subjects for contemplation, and he did not know how long he had been musing.

To be a spy upon his sister, had never entered his mind—the thought would have been rejected on the instant; and in the half unconsciousness to outward actions which generally accompanies

mental abstraction, he had not noticed, though he might have seen, that Lydia and her betrothed were pacing up and down a gravel path which, though secluded from nearly every other point of view, was fully visible from his rustic bench. His reverie dissolved just at the moment that his eyes, already directed in vacancy towards his sister, beheld her draw a note-case from the pocket of her dress ; the next moment it was unclasped, and bank-notes, six or seven in number, were counted into Charlton's hands.

Gestures, however slight, are certainly as expressive as they are commonly involuntary ; and there was something in the movements of Charlton and Lydia which clearly indicated that one party was conferring, and the other receiving, a favour. Charlton kissed the little hand that presented the money, and held it for some time fast in his own ; but he folded the crackling silver-white notes to a convenient size, and placed them in his waistcoat-pocket, without show of reluctance ; and Mark thought that

afterwards Lydia leaned on Charlton's arm more closely than before, and with one shade more of confidence than he exactly admired. But in a moment he rebuked his own judgment, recollecting that his dislike to Charlton might prejudice him against every show of affection from his sister. And yet—and yet—did not every day, almost every hour, bring forward something to give reason and strength to that dislike? Even now could he doubt who it was that had made Lydia "poor"? And was there not something repugnant to manly feeling in the idea that Charlton, with ample means to supply all his just wants, should beg or borrow from his betrothed? Such reflections, such questionings, were rapid as thought; and it was but a few moments before Mark, unwilling to be an unseen witness of their actions, rose from the garden-bench, and, ordering a horse to be saddled, determined, by violent exercise, to shake off a host of evil fancies from his mind.

But they were not to be thus easily dispelled. A long ride, it is true, cheered his spirits; but the old thoughts—which were convictions, not fancies—remained; and when, in the course of the evening, Mr. Bowring asked his daughter if she were going to purchase the new harp she had so long talked about, her evasions, her blushes, seemed to her brother only like an endorsement to his belief.

Mark never knew exactly when, or in precisely what terms, Lydia fulfilled her promise of interceding with her father for Ruth Armitage; but, in the course of two or three days after his conversation with her on the subject, he could not but see that his father was colder and more distant than ever, and that Lydia herself seemed under some strange restraint. She was, however, the first to resume the topic; but she did so when Charlton Ridley was present, and, from time to time, looked up to him as if for a word of sanction or opinion. Verily Mark saw that one trailing flower had at least found its reed to lean upon.

"I am sure I am very sorry," said Lydia, "but Papa won't hear a word on the subject. He says that he has not a pound to spare for such a purpose; and I found that I hardly dared hint about inviting her, it made him so angry."

Mark said little beyond expressing his regret at the disagreeable task which had devolved on his sister; but his heart swelled with bitterness. He felt that his condition was becoming that of a serf, and he envied the free labourer, in however lowly a condition. What was it to him that he was looked on as his father's heir? Better be striving for liberty and independence by the sweat of his brain, or of his brow, when, at least, by self-sacrifice, he could be generous or just. How fondly he thought of the Parsonage, and of the happy days he had spent there, and how insufferable appeared his present life—without sympathy, without affection! The wildest dreams chased each other through his mind. He would leave home, turn mathe-

matical teacher—to this he was equal; or author, for a glimmer of desire shone in that quarter; or mechanic, if need be. Any suffering for liberty. Let his father disinherit him; better so at once, than live in dread of what would very likely come at last. Better, a thousand times, than twenty years of servitude. Mr. Bowring seemed likely enough to live as long; and, God forbid, that he should wish his father dead.

His soul was in a tumult, and he was hardly conscious that Lydia had left the room, when Charlton Ridley drew his chair a little nearer, and said, in a voice intended to seem confidential, "The truth is, my boy, that your father knows all about it."

"All about what?" asked Mark, in amazement.

"Come, don't be so innocent; the governor is not so easily deceived as you think."

"Deceived! I have never deceived him in my life."

"Tut, tut! he knows all about the little cousin."

"About Ruth Armitage? Mr. Ridley, you must be more explicit."

"Well, really I am sorry to have unpleasant things to say; but Mr. Bowring is of opinion—and I must agree with him—that this young person, if she is your cousin, must be a very forward minx to have made you her confidant. And your father desired me to warn you against any ridiculous love affair; you are much too young to think of marrying."

"I should think so!" interrupted Mark; "but my cousin Ruth is ——"

"Well, we won't discuss her merits. I dare say she is pretty, or that you think her so, which amounts to just the same thing. But the message I have from your father is, that he warns you from any foolish entanglement with any low under-bred girl, or any person of light character. Such an one he would never receive."

“Marrying—my marrying! It is absurd. I shall not think of such a thing for years to come. But I cannot listen to reproach of a poor innocent girl. I deny every accusation you have made; she is purity—modesty itself. Nor is she under-bred, as you insinuate. She is defenceless; and wherever there is opportunity I will be her champion. My father has a right to deny my request, to leave her to her penury, and her dignified struggles; but he has no right to rob her of her good name; and I will go to him this instant, and demand retraction. Excuse me, Mr. Ridley, but my father has been wanting in delicacy in giving you this commission.”

Mark spoke as he felt, warmly; his face flushed, his eye sparkled, and his voice trembled with emotion. But Charlton Ridley answered blandly,

“You may think what you say. I have nothing to do with the delicacy of the question; only I really must forbid you to disturb your

father ; he expressly insisted that anything you might have to say should come through me or your sister."

Mark started, as if something venomous had stung him ; and yet he remembered his resolution, at the very moment that it cost him so hard a struggle to keep it. He dared not trust himself to speak ; but waving his hand as an entreaty for Charlton to be silent, he hurried from the room.

CHAP. XV.

MARK IN LONDON.

THERE is an Eastern story of a man who—thinking himself no doubt a very clever fellow,—desired, in the presence of a certain potentate, to show his dexterity, by separating with his fingers certain grains of wheat from the chaff; and when he had achieved the feat, the king or emperor, or vizier or sultan or whatever the potentate might be, rewarded his prowess by a present of the chaff. It is one of those stories, which are of equal value, whether the facts narrated happened or not; and I own to a profound reverence for that be-turbaned vizier—if vizier it was, a reverence that would not diminish, if he

were proved to be only the creation of an Oriental imagination. Acting therefore with the dread of an equally wise judgment before me, I will not narrate how, day by day, and almost hour by hour, home-discomforts, coldness, suspicions, and petty tyrannies, alienated the heart of Mark Bowring from his father's roof. The sheaf may be made up of separate grains, but when all is winnowed, we must use a larger measure than the hand, to arrive at any useful results: thus it is enough to declare, that before the winter had passed away, Mark's real unhappiness had amounted to that sum, which rendered a permanent stay at Stoneleigh impossible.

As a matter of course, Charlton Ridley spent nearly one half of his time there, the intervals of his absence being to Mark, by many degrees the more endurable periods. On these occasions, his intercourse with his father approached to something that was friendly, if not filial and parental; and Mark

and Lydia, thrown together in rides and walks and in social intercourse, repeated kindnesses on his part, ought to have endeared him to her, and sometimes seemed to do so. But he bitterly felt how slight and temporary was his influence, with either father or sister ; all the way made in Charlton's absence had to be tracked over and over again. His return was ever like the ebb of a wave, that drove back all the good, which was rising in their hearts, leaving only the old coldness, hardness, and suspicion.

Most of all—aye, more than he mourned over his own lot—Mark Bowring grieved for the one fault of Lydia's character—its weakness. Her own impressions, her natural impulses were all good, but they seemed of wax, and melted to any shape at her lover's bidding ; at least as yet he had found it so, and perhaps Charlton Ridley never thought that there might be in her soul, finer springs of less malleable quality. In estimating her worth

Mark did her justice; for he believed that she would have been noble, had she loved worthily—had her convictions and impulses been set to adamant by the spell of her affections.

How common is this feminine weakness,—and how terribly does conventional training foster and increase it! Of women's saddest heart-histories, nine out of ten will be found to owe their tragic elements to a want of self-reliance, to the leaning on a reed that pierces, to the trailing near the earth, a parasite to some low thing, instead of clinging only to the lofty stem that shall guide the aspiring tendrils skywards. And yet a girl is taught that yielding docility, unquestioning obedience — to any hap-hazard authority — are prime virtues; and if her Creator has dowered her with the one element of firmness, which might be a strong anchor to her through all the storms of life, it is called by such bad names, that she grows at last to war against

it herself. **Obstinacy ! Self-will !** O parents ! do not seek to break the fine springs you call so harshly ; enlighten the will, direct the firmness, and meanwhile do not make of yourselves a false destiny, by shielding childish errors from their childish consequences. So shall experience be bought low priced and early !

The result of numberless discussions was this : Mark was to take up his abode in London, with an allowance of one hundred a year, exclusive of the expenses incurred by entering him at the London University. His father "hoped" that in the course of a year, Mark would bend to his will, and select one of the professions which would please him ; meanwhile Mr. Bowring considered it prudent, by limiting his income to the lowest standard of a gentleman's maintenance, to remove from him temptations to extravagance and dissipation.

Of course such a step as this could not

be taken without Mrs. Ridley's advice, approval, or interference; consequently she was deputed to find a suitable home for Mark Bowring in the metropolis. This she did by arranging for his reception in a second-rate boarding-house, where, in consideration of his occupying a miserable attic, where he must perforce have shivered fireless in winter, and been painfully reminded in summer, of the Venetian *piombi*—he was only to pay about three quarters of his income. But Mrs. Ridley had always a motive for her actions, and now she had two; first as she had selected the abode, she confidently expected to hear from Mrs. Clutterclack the mistress, a full and particular account of Mark's doings and sayings, in reply to any questions she might determine to ask; and secondly it was her wish that Mark should have little or no pocket money to spare, and thus be led into the temptation of getting into debt, and outstripping his income.

Yet was it curious to see how the youth's simple straightforward character led him to break through Mrs. Ridley's meshes, as if they had been no stronger than a spider's web. He did not like the noisy scrambling meals, and the miscellaneous company ; he wanted quiet opportunities for reading : he did not like the little suffocating unventilated attic, and least of all did he like the attempt to force from him three parts of his income in payment for these discomforts, when he had plans and purposes to fulfil, which demanded every pound he could justly withdraw from his personal expenditure. Accordingly, one holiday, when there was neither class nor lecture to attend, he devoted the afternoon to lodging-hunting, and was so successful, that in one of the unpretending little streets, near the New Road, he engaged apartments of modest—even humble appearance ; yet had they that exquisite neatness and cleanliness which seem to confer a proud respectability on barefaced poverty.

The occupier of the small house in the little street, was a widow woman ; who, as the phrase goes, "had seen better days," and was now endeavouring to earn a subsistence for herself and two young children. Over her shop appeared in glowing letters, the words "Circulating Library"; and at her door, a dark board with white letters lured the passer-by with its enumeration of new novels and attractive serials. Fancy stationery was displayed in the window, and children's toys were to be found in a dim recess of the shop ; and though the poor woman had a busy life behind her counter, she was probably repaid for her toil, by doing a fraction more than "making both ends meet."

Mark's rooms were the neat first floor above the shop. A few spring flowers—crocuses and wallflowers—decorated his table ; the cheap carpet reflected no form or colour to offend the eye ; over his mantelpiece a small looking-glass was inserted in the wall, the flowering-pattern paper being arranged to do duty for a more

costly frame ; there was one chintz-covered easy chair deserving the name, the others I must confess were of common cane ; the stove was brightly black, and ready for a fire ; and the windows, clear as crystal, were amply shaded by full curtains of scarlet-twilled cotton. The bedchamber was furnished in an equally unostentatious manner, so it really was understandable, that Mrs. Symes could afford to let her rooms “for a permanency” at ten shillings a week.

The required week's notice was given to Mrs. Clutterclack, and in due time a cab conveyed Mark Bowring and his worldly possessions—a portmanteau, carpet bag and a few books, to the new domicile. The next day, he wrote to his father, apprising him of the discomforts which had induced his change of residence, and called on Mrs. Ridley to communicate the circumstances to her. She was just closing a letter to Charlton, who was then visiting at Stoneleigh ; and she added a postscript about

Mark's ingratitude — headstrong obstinacy — and disrespect to herself, of which her hopeful son well knew how to make the most.

For the first time in his life, Mark felt himself his own master ; and no doubt, to a youth overflowing with mere animal spirits, there would have been something intoxicating in the first draught of liberty. But it must never be forgotten, that Mark Bowring had been a “neglected child” ; emphatically so, for he had not been beaten or starved, or in any way corporeally ill treated ; but he had been brought up on the system, that a certain provision and education must be afforded him, as a point of conduct due to Mr. Bowring’s own respectability ; his studies and pleasures had alike been cared for by hirelings, and it was no merit of his father’s that he had been happy at the Parsonage. He had never been the first object to any dear friend, or relative. Since the days of nurse Morris’s caresses, he had never experienced the little sweetesses of a

petting personal love; and though feeling vaguely the want, had never known what it was to have the full bright rays of sympathy light up the dim recesses of his own nature. One of our cleverest female writers says, truly, that men and women are “good for nothing till they have been well broken-up by suffering.” The theme is capable of ample illustration; the spoilt favourite of unclouded prosperity is, in his unawakened sympathies and ignorant imaginings of life, a child still even to his three-score years and ten of mortal existence. But the child who has known early sorrows—from whatever cause—has always a precocious knowledge, a marvellous human experience, which is sure, according to the disposition, to mould the character in strong defined lines:—

“The Divine is born
Ever of bitterness.”

And they who have learned in the school of suffering do not grudge the teacher’s payment.

Thus, in his nineteenth year, was Mark Bowring able to look at life rationally and calmly; and consider his own position with unblinded mental vision. He had learned to put a just value on many things, which youth, when less experienced, is apt to prize too highly. He felt that the humbleness of his abode could not deprive him of any real good; it made him neither less of a gentleman, nor less of a scholar; instinctively he shrank from the habit of forming indiscriminate acquaintances — that quicksand which swallows up time, energy, money, and all the capabilities for success in life—contenting himself with the occasional companionship of one or two fellow-students, believing if he thought on the subject at all, that the one or two precious friends —whom they who deserve friendship surely meet sooner or later— never come from the seeking. He was perfectly aware, that his father could alienate from him every shilling of his property, if he so pleased; and bitterly

conscious of the small share of love that father bore him, and of the misinterpreting and undermining influence which was at work, he looked forward to disinheritance, on some slight pretence as one of the probable accidents of his life. What then? Had he not a fortune beyond the price of lands and money? Youth, health, a brain that could think, and hands that could work. To Mr. Greyson he owed much; and among other obligations, his first appreciation of the true dignity of Labour.

CHAP. XVI.

IS SOMEWHAT DESULTORY.

His cousin Ruth had not been forgotten or neglected by Mark Bowring. True, he had failed to interest his father in her behalf, and true that he had been stung to the quick by the insinuations of Charlton Ridley; but Mark had none of the selfish cowardice which would have prompted his desertion of her. It had seemed right to him that she should be assisted in her noble, friendless struggles; and this opinion was not shaken, because others dissented from it; but how could he serve her was the question. He felt that it would be difficult for her to accept direct pecuniary assistance from

him without a compromise of her right pride, and yet he hoarded every pound he could possibly save, with the hope, that it might one day be devoted to her service. Meanwhile, he had corresponded with her while at Stoneleigh, not keeping up a frequent, impatient, answer-by-return-of-post correspondence, but writing and receiving a quiet, sensible, yet on each side somewhat egotistic epistle once in six or seven weeks. The “My dear Cousin” ran off the pen very trippingly, and saved all the trouble of pondering between cold ceremony and undue familiarity ; the result of this correspondence being a good deal of mutual confidence, and the evolvement of a mutual interest.

When Mark took up his abode in London, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to pay his young cousin a visit ; especially when he discovered that Euston Square, where Mrs. Patterson resided, was in the neighbourhood of his own domicile. And this latter circumstance, readily accounted for occasional meetings,

which really could not have been very easily avoided, even if an attempt to avoid them had been made. After service on Sunday mornings, the cousins usually shook hands beneath the portico of St. Pancras Church, and as Ruth often walked with her little pupils, there is no wonder that going to and from the University, Mark sometimes met her. Nurse Morris was no longer in the family, the children having outgrown the requirement of her services; so once again she had gone among strangers to form new ties and affections.

The summer had come: and what Londoner is there who cannot vividly picture summer in town? I do not mean in those palace-mansions situated in the most salubrious quarters looking out on the parks—or at worst, on spacious squares; though even here one marvels at the fascination of fashion, which can chain down beneath a metropolitan atmosphere, and in an imprisonment of bricks and mortar, those who might, by the exercise of the will, flee away to

groves and gardens. But the crowd—the mass of Londoners, who are not included in the magic circle to which are attracted as by a magnet, in this the Season, all that is great in Literature, Science, and Art—the rich fruit of a life's devotion to a task, and that life the life of genius—the miracles of music, painting, sculpture—the triumphs of mechanical skill, which, taught by Taste, make the glory of manufactures—these are the “fascinations”—strong ones indeed; and add to them the intercourse with cultivated minds, which reveals to us Conversation, as one of the refining arts.

But to the crowd, the mass—many of whom would have a keen relish and appreciation of the intellectual banquet spread for wealth and station—the summer in London is a sad thing—the crowd inhabiting narrow streets, small houses, close rooms, that seem each and all to be sealed against fresh breezes and the breath of flowers; and to hold suspended, as if

by some patent right, a dirty, dusty, heavy, spirit-crushing atmosphere. The sunshine, when it streams in, appears not to light and to cheer so much as to heat like a furnace ; the ray, as it peers through the window, shows a column of dancing moats—the grains of soot which lie upon the table—and, very likely, lays bare the shabbiness of the surrounding “gentility”; but it sheds no perceptible vigour through the sickly geraniums, which are fondly cherished, though wasting their little strength in drooping leaves and pallid stalks, they hardly know how to push out now and then a tiny blossom. The denizens of these homes hear of the miracles of art, the wonders of manufactures, the triumphs of genius; and now and then watch, with true hero-worship, to see a celebrity descend from his carriage, lucky if they are not jostled and told to get out of the way : but the magic circle is not for them, and the London summer is another thing from the London Season.

Something of all this was perceived and felt by Mark Bowring, though his own cheerful little rooms, kept bright and neat by his good landlady, bore the charm which can never be dissociated from the first realisation of *home*. But the slight chance-acquaintances he made at the College, and the murmur of busy life which he felt around him, taught him in a few months more of middle-class existence than fifty years' reading and musing about it could have done. He saw how fierce was the struggle to win and keep a desirable place on the social scale ; and how all were pushing on for the few prizes which the world rates highly, regardless, in their insane rush after what so many would never reach, of the real happiness which had lain almost in their path. He heard it said, that the deserving always "got on" ; but his observation taught him to qualify the aphorism. It might be that *only* the shrewd and energetic won the prizes from Fortune's wheel ; but it seemed that the blind goddess had not prizes

enough to supply all who presented their credentials; while assuredly he perceived that there were lofty natures condemned to lowly places, apparently because they wanted one little pulse of energy, or had not the alloy of worldly wisdom with which to temper the too malleable gold of their characters.

Perhaps his neglected childhood, and, in some respects, sorrowful youth, had taught Mark Bowring to look at Life from the earnest point of view; perhaps he inherited the poetic temperament and philosophic mind, and must, under any circumstances, have been a thinker as well as a doer. However this might be, it is certain that beneath the modesty of manner so natural to youth, there was a latent power of thought and expression uprising which now and then startled the ears of his elders, when only expecting some boyish sally. Among his youthful companions he was neither remarkably popular nor the reverse—probably they but half understood him; and though two or three of

them very sincerely “liked” him, occasionally passed their arms through his for a stroll, and dropped in, very welcome guests, at his “snuggery,” he escaped one of the greatest misfortunes which I believe can happen to young persons—a large indiscriminate visiting acquaintance: that bane which saps to the very foundation all habits of steadiness and concentration, and tends to make every pursuit shadowy, superficial, and desultory.

Mark’s few and far-between visits to Stoneleigh were seldom worthy to be marked with white; if he escaped positive insult, something like a sense of gratulation crept into his heart, such an ordinary manner was that of coldness, chiding, or neglect. Still was Lydia, or yet more frequently Charlton Ridley, the appointed mediator between father and son; and even the quarterly cheque, which was always sent with laudable punctuality, was generally filled up and directed in Charlton’s handwriting.

All the pleasure which ought to have been

called forth by visiting his father's house seemed reserved for those few occasions when Mark bestowed some of his vacation time on his dear revered friends at Shinglebay, where, seated between Mr. and Mrs. Greyson, he was in thought again the boy-student, while he talked over the happy years he had spent with them; or drew fresh strength for any encounters the future might bring, from their sympathy, advice, and affection.

And thus a year or two passed away, unmarked by any prominent event or stirring action; but during this time Mark Bowring had been almost his own master in all the smaller arrangements of every-day existence, and by this means there had strengthened in him certain habits of prompt decision, self-control, and self-reliance, which under opposite circumstances would probably have been far less cultivated.

CHAP. XVII.

THE EVENING WALK.

“WRONG! I think you have done quite right, and ought to have made a stand long ago,” was the reply of Mark Bowring to a question asked him by his cousin Ruth.

They were walking together one pleasant summer evening round and round, near the railings of one of the Squares in the neighbourhood of Gower-street. Ruth’s pupils were gone to a “children’s party,” and it being one of the three or four occasions on which Mark had had the boldness deliberately to call and ask her to take a walk, there had been no obstacle raised to her doing so.—The conversation as usual became confidential

and personal, and Ruth having informed her companion, that she had that day summoned courage to ask Mrs. Patterson for an increase of salary, sought his opinion on the subject. Hence his rejoinder.

It was barely twilight. The dusty streets were crowded with pedestrians of various classes, many of them evidently escaping from close rooms, for a refreshing stroll. The garden of the Square with its fading lilacs, and drooping laburnums seemed to have invited all those who had the privilege of the *entrée*; and perhaps the London-bred girl, to whom usually a single green tree or flower pot is poetry, did look through the railings with something like desire to be within them written on her countenance. However this might be just as they were passing one of the gates, an old gentleman, who was a bowing acquaintance of Mark's from their having frequently met at a Lecture Hall, which they both pretty regularly attended—was

passing in, and civilly asked if they would like to enter. This they gladly did, and after traversing the different gravel paths several times, rested themselves on one of the garden seats.

"I am glad I have your approval," said Ruth, in answer to her cousin's remark; "I have long shrunk from seeming to overrate my own abilities or services; but it seemed to me, that Mrs. Patterson would never be the one to offer an advance of salary, and you, Mark, know that it is not for the sake of having smarter bonnets and shawls, that I want money, but to pay the long—long-standing debt to Miss Green, which with all my efforts is not yet a quarter cancelled. I think even Mrs. Patterson, if she knew the sorrow this feeling of debt is to me, would cheerfully consent to pay me a little better."

"Is the consciousness of this debt so great a grief to you?" said Mark, after a slight pause, and with one tone more of tenderness in his manner than was common to him.

"O I shall soon pay it off, if Mrs. Patterson will but give me forty pounds a year," and Ruth spoke gaily, exactly because Mark's kindness of manner had brought the tears to her eyes, and they might have begun to flow had she indulged the serious mood.

"It *is* more than a quarter cancelled" said Mark, taking her hand and pressing it for a moment between both of his. "You must not be angry with me, Ruth, that I have claimed the privilege of our relationship, and helped you in this matter.—I too have had my little savings and paid an instalment or two to Miss Green, I think you cannot now owe her more than twenty pounds."

"O Mark! generous, kind cousin, how can I requite you? Never, never!"

"By being happy, and cheerful, and hopeful. This is to be a charming little secret between ourselves; if you ever tell —," and Mark held up his finger with a mock menace. "You

must know that I was guilty of a snow-white fib, by assuring Miss Green that you sent the money, as I have convinced myself, by a long train of logical reasoning, that you did; and, seriously, dear Ruth, for very particular reasons I do not wish it known that the money was not your own."

"How good! how generous! but you know it must be considered only a loan. I shall pay you some day." And with all the gratitude, there was a dash of right pride in the young girl's manner.

"Well, you shall pay me when you grow rich; meanwhile, if you tell, I'll, I'll ——."

"What will you do?" said Ruth, smiling through her tears.

"I'll —— not meet you by accident on purpose [Ah, Mark! what a confession was there] for a month: and I am sure you like to know whether I am dead or alive; at least, I know it would be a punishment to *me* not to see *you* for a month. And I'll never put

Mrs. Patterson in good humour by sending her opera-tickets again ; and I'll call in all the pet books you have of mine, and you shall not have the first reading of the next nice thing. So you see I have ample means of punishing you ; but you are going to be a good child, and do as you are told."

Is there much wonder that in this interesting and confidential discourse the time crept on unheeded ? Suddenly, at last, they became aware that they were nearly alone in the garden. Mark looked at his watch, and found, not without the help of a neighbouring gas-light, that it was past ten o'clock. They had got in, but it had never yet occurred to them how they were to get out ! One lady and gentleman were at the extreme end of the garden, and the two entrapped captives hurried, in defiance of rules and regulations, across the grass-plot, intending to solicit the favour of being uncaged. Alas ! to verify the proverb of most haste and least speed, they found themselves caught by an

invisible fence, which passed from one flower-bed to another, on purpose to prevent the very thing they were attempting ; and by the time they had retraced their steps, they had the mortification of seeing the good folks they were pursuing let themselves out at a distant gate.

Their situation now was something more than a joke. First they went the round of the large garden, trying every gate, with the vague hope of finding one unfastened ; then they stationed themselves at one, hoping some resident of one of the houses would be passing, and would be able to help them in their difficulty ; and all this time it was growing later and darker. At last, Mark scrambled over the railings, and seeing a policeman near, told him the story, and by his means procured the use of a key and extricated Ruth. By this time it was nearly eleven o'clock ; what would Mrs. Patterson say ?

Poor Ruth ! her heart palpitated so that she seemed to hear its beatings as she ascended the

steps; for well she knew that she was fully an hour later than Mrs. Patterson would have considered it decorous for her to walk with her cousin—even on a Midsummer evening. However, she had a simple, straightforward tale to tell, and this would surely be her sufficient apology.

Alas, for our most reasonable expectations! Alas, for the small accidents of life, on which so commonly great events are found to hinge! Mrs. Patterson was in a terrible temper: first, from Ruth's audacious request for an increase of salary; and, secondly, from the children having returned from their juvenile party fretful and sleepy, and, perhaps, none the better for the quantity of cakes and negus they had consumed. On these provocations came the fact of Ruth's prolonged absence, and hardly was the street-door closed behind her, when the most insulting words were uttered to her, and the most cruel and slanderous insinuations thrown out.

Gentle as was the natural character of Ruth Armitage, and schooled as she had been by adversity, still there were limits to her powers of endurance ; and perhaps her very innocence, and perfect maiden integrity, rendered her far more distressingly alive to Mrs. Patterson's terrible reproaches than a worldly-wise coquettish girl would have been : the latter, with a toss of her head, and a pert, pithy, and most emphatic denial of wrong-doing, fighting with her opponent's own sort of weapons, would very likely have silenced and convinced the virago. But poor Ruth, overwhelmed with shame that she should even be accused of light behaviour, could do little more than weep ; and, though her flooding tears, her broken exclamations, and attempted explanations, would have softened and reconciled a kinder nature, they but aggravated the insane wrath of the shrew :—this genus, be it remarked, habitually brow-beating the timid, and trampling on the weak —though cowering themselves like very slaves

to the strong hand and the authoritative voice.

Before the midnight chimed, Ruth had been commanded to quit the house by nine o'clock the next morning—Mrs. Patterson taking some credit to herself that she gave shelter to her for the night.

CHAP. XVIII.

THE OUTCAST.

PEOPLE whose calm lives leave them in want of a “strong sensation,” sometimes wish for the gift of Asmodeus, by which to peep into their neighbours’ dwellings and ascertain what is going on therein; but the thoughtful would shrink from acquiring it, unless they could combine with the spell an angelic power of wisdom and beneficence, whereby to turn aside the evil they must behold: so tragic are some of the hidden scenes around us, conjured up from the seething cauldron of human passions, weakness, and guilt.

In one of the neatest-looking houses in a quiet “genteel” street, not half a mile from

the spot where the innocent, high-minded Ruth Armitage was shrinking and weeping before unjust revilings of her persecutor, Mr. Charlton Ridley was conversing with a very opposite type of womanhood. And here does the hand tremble as it draws the picture !

O England ! will not all your wealth and wisdom serve to cleanse away the dark leper-spot of your great cities ? The moral poison of which permeates more or less through every branch of the social system ! O ye Religionists ! who read, and talk, and preach of Mary Magdalene at the Cross, cannot you hold out a little finger to the living Magdalenes ? or is there still to be for them no choice between the "dark flowing river" and the Pandemonium of continued Infamy ?

The room in which the pair sat was a small drawing-room, expensively and even elegantly furnished ; and yet an observer of fine taste would have felt that there was a something somewhere wanting. The expense and the

elegance displayed were correct according to the ideas of a fashionable upholsterer ; but the want was the want of a refined and accomplished mind, beneath whose influence a crowning charm might have been given—the influence that is seen in the droop of a drapery, the assortment of colours, and that happy *juste milieu* of richness, which, while ample and abundant, keeps far away from the boundary line of tawdriness and vulgarity. The lady's dress partook of the same character ; it was of silk, of that quality that, as the phrase is, “stands on end” ; but, it is worthy of remark, that these rich silks require a dignified and graceful presence to set them off to advantage. They by no means suit the restless, fidgetty manner of such a personage as the *ci-devant* little milliner—the wretched, degraded woman who now called herself Mrs. Seymour. In a neat cotton dress and housemaid's cap, she would have looked infinitely better. Nevertheless, she was not without beauty—of a sort.

Bright hazel eyes shone out above cheeks to which something more than a *soupçon* of rouge appeared to have been applied ; a quantity of brown hair fell in profuse ringlets, or was held up by gilt combs ; a set of white and even teeth redeemed a large coarse mouth ; and her hands, soft and fair, from idleness and careful gloving, were overloaded with rings, which the wearer perpetually pulled on and off and shifted, from the under-bred habit of digital disquiet.

Mr. Charlton Ridley was very much at his ease, smoking a cigar in the fine drawing-room and in the presence of the fine lady. Glasses, and two or three sorts of wine, as well as spirits, were on the table—a *petit souper* being apparently just over—and to judge by the manner in which the lady helped herself, she was quite prepared to keep her companion in countenance.

“So you still use the cigar case I made you,” said Mrs. Seymour, “lifting up that which Charlton had taken from his pocket—“ah !

how well I remember the hours, the dreadful thoughts which filled my mind as I worked it. It was just after—well do you know I almost wish you would give it me back again."

"What for, Polly?"

"I hardly know; there, put it out of sight, that's all;" but as the wretched woman spoke, a change of colour might have been observed in her cheek even through the rouge; and her voice trembled, as if some bitter memory had been aroused.

Charlton Ridley bit his lip. He wished his cigar case with all its choice Havannahs in the kennel, rather than it should have kindled that train of association. The assistance of this fallen creature was necessary to certain of his plans; and if she once got on the well-worn track of "old times," there would be a scene, and instead of gaining his ends, he should have to take up his hat and leave her. Now, whenever men of Charlton Ridley's stamp want to lead a woman into some pit of wickedness, they

invariably assume the sentimental—if not the positively tender manner; accordingly he took poor Polly's hand, and holding it in one of his, passed the other arm round the back of her chair, then modulating his voice, like the practised artist that he was, to the most soul-melting key, he said:—

“Why do you break my heart, Polly, by allusions to those olden times; is it not enough anguish for me to find you here surrounded by luxuries, that—that are the gift of another?”

And here he squeezed her hand—and hesitated whether he should venture on a kiss. The rouge rather repelled him; and besides he considered on the whole, that the deferential would be the better tactics.

“Can you doubt why it is,” he continued, “that I visit you so seldom? It is because I have yet to help the work of time, have yet to complete the schooling which is changing old feelings into friendship—Polly we are friends, are we not?”

For answer there were only tears, and very soon the rouge was nearly washed, or wiped away.

“ My wretched life ! ” sobbed the poor girl.

“ At least ” returned Ridley, “ there is one person who understands it all, and, whatever others may say, has the truest respect for you (another squeeze of the hand), and the sincerest friendship. It was with the belief that we were friends, that I wrote to you yesterday—that I came here to night—for it is an office of friendship I want from you.”

“ You know,” murmured the wretched girl, “ that I would do anything in the world for you, when you are kind and feeling.”

“ I know you would ; and after all it is not much, only to get a cheque changed for me in the city, and you shall keep a ten pound note for your trouble—that is, if you are not too grand a lady to accept such a thing.”

“ Indeed I am not. For money I have next to none. Old Tallow-and-Wax, as you call

him, ever since I found out that he was a Russia merchant, pays my bills, and makes me plenty of presents; but he is too much afraid I should save and run away from him, to trust me with a purse."

"And would you be so silly?"

"I don't know; don't let us talk of it; there's always Waterloo Bridge at last; not likely to break down, or the Thames dry up in my time; but I won't be sentimental—give me some more wine. There—another glass, and now tell me what am I to do about this cheque?"

"In the first place, dress yourself as neatly and quietly as possible; make that pretty face look as pale and as demure as is in its nature, and if you could have a small parcel of books, or roll of music in your hand, à la governess, so much the better. Then make your way to Lombard Street in whatever manner it pleases you; but when you have got the cheque cashed—and bring the odd twenty-five pounds

in gold, that's as much as you can conveniently carry—don't forget to ask some of the clerks, whether the New Road omnibuses pass that way—the New Road ones remember—probably they'll advise you not to trust yourself in an omnibus, with so much money, and whether they do or not, don't get into one. I'll be on the look-out for you, at the corner of the street, and put you into a cab."

"For how much is the cheque?"

"Two hundred and twenty-five pounds."

"And if you are to go to the corner of the street, why cannot you yourself get it changed?"

"Ah, that is the secret, which I will tell you one of these days, it is too long a story for to-night. What I want from your friendship just now, is to do what I ask you, implicitly following my instructions."

"And if the bankers ask me any questions, what shall I say?"

"It is not the least likely they will. But if

they do—say you are a relation of the drawer of the cheque—you see the name at the bottom—and that you come from your cousin, his son."

"But who is his son?"

"Well, I suppose I must explain so far; you don't mind telling a few fibs for me, I know,—but mind, Polly, this is no joke, you must keep the secret."

"How can you doubt me—when you have *such* a secret as mine!" and the girl looked up into his countenance, with an expression beneath which even he quailed.

"And how can you, Polly, love to revert to the past horrors and terrors of your life by such allusions,—why not bury these hateful memories once and for ever."

"Because they refuse to be buried, they will haunt me, that shocking prison—that horrible accusation;—well, well; only you should not doubt that I can keep your secrets."

“Well, if it comes to the push, you must say your own name is Ruth Armitage, and that you come from your cousin Mark Bowring.—I’ll write down an address, if you should have to give it, though don’t be afraid—it is not the true one. But I am sure all this will be unnecessary—all I wish is, for the clerks possibly to remember, that you intimated you were returning to the New Road. Above all, though, take care not to mention my name.”

“Are you sure you are not getting me into a scrape?”

“Don’t you think I am rather too good a lawyer for that? Trust to me; but now say what time to morrow you can do this.”

“About one o’clock—will that suit?”

“Excellently; you are a good girl, and I’d trust you with a secret that would hang me—if I had one.”

“Would you? — Well; I shall not fail you.”

"I know that. And now good night; here is the cheque put it somewhere carefully away."

So saying Charlton Ridley took his leave.

She would not fail him! No, poor guilty creature that she was; with moral feeling so warped and withered, that she felt very little shock or shame at the falsehoods she had undertaken to utter, or the imposture she was to practise. But she believed, that though Charlton Ridley had, under one set of circumstances, deceived her into the belief, that he was attached to her, or, rather might it not be suffered her to deceive herself? as she thought, when she tried to extenuate him —yet that she was under a debt of gratitude to him of such magnitude that no action of hers could cancel it: —gratitude for saving her, in his capacity of barrister, from a frightful ignominious death, and, rescuing her from the imputation of the one crime, from which her whole woman's nature the most violently

recoiled. This wretched being had once been a mother; and so strong in her, was the divine maternal instinct, that had her child been spared to her—base-born that it was—it might have fulfilled an Angel's mission, have lifted her from the slough into which she had fallen, have rescued for her a future—and yet, with circumstantial evidence strong against her, she had been accused of destroying it!

CHAP. XIX.

A MIDNIGHT COLLOQUY.

IT was past midnight when Charlton Ridley reached home; and a little to his surprise, and not at all to his satisfaction, he found his mother still up. He had entered with a latch key, and as noiselessly as possible, but Mrs. Ridley was a good listener, and waylaid him at the drawing-room door.

“I have waited up for you,” she exclaimed, motioning to him to come into the room; “because I want to speak to you, and really you are so little at home, that it is no easy matter to do.”

It is curious to remark, how a certain pitch of the voice, and perhaps some invoca-

luntary gesture, in those we know intimately, prepare us for the sort of discourse that is to follow. Charlton was quite sure his mother had nothing pleasant to say, before she uttered another word, and so on the principle of preparing his defences before he was attacked he replied somewhat peevishly.

“Well, be quick, for I am very tired and sleepy.”

“You always seem,” rejoined the lady, “to be in a hurry when you are going out, and too tired to talk to me when you come in. But, really, it is high time I should know what you are about. It is with the greatest difficulty, I can keep the duns from applying to your father, and if once there is an *exposé* with him you must take the consequences.”

“And what would they be, do you think?” said he doggedly, and tapping his boot very vigorously with his cane, as he leaned back in the easy chair he had taken.

“I can tell you—utter ruin. Somehow

or other he has got hold of the fact, that Mr. Bowring is not on good terms with his son; and instead of being thankful for the prospect this very circumstance opens to you, as the affianced husband of Lydia, his head is full of the most ridiculous crotchets, about it being most dishonorable of you to take advantage of such a thing—that you ought to try and reconcile them in fact—and I am sure that if he were aware of your debts, what with anger at your extravagance, and indignation at your deception, he would blurt out everything to Mr. Bowring, on the plea of asking his advice, and washing his own hands — that is his elegant phrase,—from bearing part or parcel in what he chooses to call our duplicity.”

Charlton Ridley had grown white with anger as his mother spoke; and, in his suppressed passion, had bent the unoffending cane till it snapped in two, and then hurled the fragments across the room, to the imminent peril of

looking-glasses and ornaments; and now he muttered between his teeth reproaches against his father, which it seems that it would blister the page to write.

“Have you any money forthcoming?” resumed Mrs. Ridley; “that is the question. I have ceased to ask you whence you obtain the money to stop gaps even, though the part I have taken in seeing people for you, and so giving you a shield of respectability that has staved off many an importunity, might have entitled me to your confidence. But surely I may know if you have anything to give me with which to quiet your creditors?”

“Yes, you shall have a hundred pounds for this purpose to-morrow.”

“Which you have won at play?” said Mrs. Ridley, enquiringly.

“No such thing; you had better guess again,” retorted the son.

“Lydia has been selling out some more of her money for you?”

"Not that, either ; but it is enough for you, that I will bring you the money to-morrow afternoon ; and if you could add a little ——."

"You know I cannot, you ungrateful boy," whimpered his mother. "You know that all my private means were lost in the Railway Panic ; that you have drained me of every guinea, and that your father grows stingier every day of his life. The cruel thing is, he won't believe that I am without money."

"The boy that cried, 'Wolf!'" replied Ridley, sarcastically.

"And for whom was it I did so?" she exclaimed, with greater bitterness.

"Well, well, mother ; don't let us quarrel. You'll see what a steady fellow I shall be when once I'm out of my difficulties. I'd marry Lydia to-morrow, and get her morsel of money ; only from the way in which what is left is invested, I could not do it without the old man's knowledge, and I am in such high favour with him as a pattern of prudence, that

it would be most mischievous to arouse his suspicions."

"Does he mean to live for ever?" ejaculated Mrs. Ridley.

"Well, I think not; he is breaking up fast. And though his fits of gout are less frequent than heretofore, there's a general dulness and drowsiness about him that make my services as indispensable as ever. I don't think that he has written three letters for himself these six months."

"Has he made his Will?"

"It is drawn up, mother; and that I think is something."

"And the wretched boy has no influence with him?"

"The wretched boy, as you call him, seldom troubles Stoneleigh with his presence; and as the correspondence with him rests entirely either with Lydia or me, there is little mischief to be apprehended."

"It is a wonder Lydia has been so willing to throw him over."

“She is not willing to do anything of the sort. Lydia is very unhappy to think she has a brother of so depraved a disposition as to be a radical, a democrat, a corn-law repealer ; a brother who is avowedly educating himself to be an advocate of all horrible doctrines. And Lydia is a woman in love, and therefore allows all her passions and prejudices to be guided—like trained steeds by their driver—according as one individual touches the rein. My good mother, you are a wise woman in your generation ; but there are a few more things in life than even you are aware of : for, being superior to such a weakness as the tender passion yourself, I don’t think you know what idiots we can make of most women, if we only set about it in earnest.”

And this being—this Joanna Ridley, that bore the woman’s shape, and was called “mother”—looked up at the bad man who spoke, with a smile on her lips, and gazed with admiration at his noble figure, and the Satanic beauty of his countenance !

“Poor Lydia!” she murmured, much in the tone that one would commiserate a blind kitten condemned to some speedy painless death. “Poor Lydia! well, I do hope you will be kind to her.” And thus saying, Mrs. Ridley lighted the ready chamber candles, and the precious Mother and Son took their way to their respective chambers.

CHAP. XX.

MISFORTUNES ARE SOMETIMES BLESSINGS IN
DISGUISE.

MARK BOWRING had plenty to occupy his mind. He was of the age when great changes and developments either for good or for evil are usually going on in the human character; and with him the Intellect had long been asserting its supremacy. Some young people acquire knowledge by fits and starts, have fevers and enthusiasms about various pursuits in turn, opening as it were their whole soul to certain influences for a time; but after the flood comes a Nile-like ebb, and though undoubtedly there are many rich deposits left behind, the mind so cultivated, is on the whole less stored, and less

strengthened than that of the equally enthusiastic but more systematic and patient student. Mark belonged to the latter class, his enthusiasm being permanent and sustaining, rather than fitful and demonstrative; and thus it came to pass, that his mind was really much more matured than he himself thought. Like every true student, he only saw before him Alp rising on Alp, and with eye fixed on the "Excelsior" banner, he did not turn back his gaze, to measure his own ascent with the steps of the mounters of hillocks, and the creepers on the plains.

He had plenty to occupy his mind; he was at the head of all his classes, but he had imposed new tasks on himself, by which to maintain his honourable position, and moreover had recently joined a Debating Society, of which he was already a conspicuous member. No doubt there is a fair amount of nonsense talked in these seminaries of oratory; but probably not more than in more high-sounding

assemblies: at any rate they work well, they draw off young men from mere sensuous amusements; they excite them to read and to think, and encourage that just amount of confidence, without which there is no getting on in the world. Well, there was to be a debate, the last of the season, on some very interesting topic, I think it was to be the contrast and comparison between Peter the Great, and the Great Napoleon, the evening following that on which Mark parted with his cousin Ruth at Mrs. Patterson's door, and in the morning, his table was covered with books of history, in two or three languages, which he had been consulting. Nevertheless he felt a disturbing anxiety about poor Ruth, a certainty that she had been hardly judged by Mrs. Patterson, and what with his real affection for her, which was much deeper seated than he perhaps was aware, and his naturally tender and sympathetic heart, he felt that he could not rest until he had ascertained all that might have happened. So about

twelve o'clock, having quite made up his mind on the little point on which he had a doubt, and decided that Peter did not intend to execute his son Alexis ; and that if he had so intended, the repeated treasons of the serpent-like youth quite justified the act—he put on his hat, and dismissing the Man of Destiny, and the heroic Czar for the present from his mind, hastened to Euston Square.

Strange and mysterious are those mental forebodings, to which sensitive natures are so commonly subject. As Mark knocked at the door, his hand almost trembled from his evil presentiment; and he who was to be so eloquent in a few hours, before a quizzing, if not a critical auditory, hardly knew how to frame his simple inquiry. But when he heard from the servant who opened the door, that Miss Armitage “was gone—had left for good that morning,” all Mark’s powers of thought, speech, and decision returned to him in full force. He insisted on an interview with Mrs. Patterson,

and by dint of insisting obtained one; yet after all for little purpose, the lady belonging to that type of character, which few of us, I am afraid, have not sometime or other encountered—and, for our sins, been tormented by—people, who having only the narrowest possible thread-line of reason, by which to arrive at conclusions, when they have directed themselves to a wrong conclusion, pertinaciously cling to it; and make of their error a fixed idea, which not all the arguments in the world can disturb. Consequently the simple explanation of the circumstances which had detained Ruth Armitage on the previous evening; Mark's respectful apologies for himself as the original cause of her apparent transgression, and earnest assurance that she was wholly blameless, made not the slightest impression on the weak-minded, cold-hearted woman before him.

“It was most disreputable for a young woman to be out with a gentleman at eleven o'clock

at night," was the again repeated answer to every assertion.

"Her own cousin, madam, was the gentleman," said Mark, extenuatingly.

"Cousin! — how do I know you are her cousin?" interposed the virago.

Mark Bowring's cheek flushed with honest indignation; and he answered haughtily.

"Your sex, madam, protects you from my proper rejoinder; not tamely would I answer the *man* who doubted her word or mine. I have now only to demand from you, whither Miss Armitage has gone?"

"I don't know; it was nothing to me where she went, but perhaps my servants may be aware."

"Permit me to enquire;" and as Mark spoke, he moved towards the bell.

"O certainly."

The result of his inquiries was, that the footman "had heard Miss Armitage direct the cabman to drive to Kensington;" and the house-

maid thought "she had gone back to the school she used to be at."

This information was quite enough for Mark. With the most frigid leave-taking, he quitted the house; and it need hardly be added, made the very best of his way to Miss Green's establishment.

It would be difficult to analyse Mark Bowring's feelings at this juncture. Perhaps the most prominent of them was a most tender pity for the young girl who had been so cruelly wronged and insulted; but this pity was mingled with an abhorring indignation against Mrs. Patterson, and a curious and admiring satisfaction that Ruth had not communicated with himself at this painful crisis, but had hastened to the protection, which, in her desolation, seemed the most meet for her. Now for any one to suppose that this satisfaction arose from a disinclination to be troubled in the affair—and to advise, help, or comfort—would be doing him the greatest injustice; nay,

he felt even that he had a responsibility in her disaster, that it was his duty to protect and aid her, and that since he had unwittingly brought undeserved disgrace upon her, he must not rest until he had removed it. But he approved the delicacy which had refrained from putting forth claims ; and long before he reached Miss Green's abode, his cousin Ruth had mounted to a higher throne in his imagination than any she had yet filled.

Why should schools—of course I am speaking of the common-place ordinary sort—be made to resemble prisons?—why should school-rooms so generally be dreary carpetless apartments, always cold in winter, and hot in summer, ill ventilated, and ill kept, with an unpolished stove, and unrubbed windows — and always pervaded by a musty smell of old books? These are problems to which the key has not yet been found ; and meanwhile, instead of wondering at parents' occasional disappointments, the miracle seems to me that children are able at

all to rise against the miserable depressing influences that surround them. If children themselves do not always and perpetually complain, I take it this circumstance is a sadder sign than any other. Yet there is a vast amount of real misery in schools—misery from want of sympathy, affection, and cheerfulness, that is often deep enough to sadden a girl for life—and I think it might fairly be said, that the unhappiest child in a common-place school, is likely to be the noblest character in it. Girls, for the most part, are so docile, so ready to obey, so anxious to be guided, possessed of so large a faith that “whatever is, is right”—that the bravery of endurance—a woman’s birthright!—is called fatally early into action—and it is often only when a woman looks back to her childhood that she perceives how much she has suffered; how cruelly she has been robbed of her light-heartedness, and how the first strong energy for forbearance has been worn and wasted.

Miss Green’s was not lower on the scholastic

scale, making twenty degrees its range, than what the world would call a third-rate school; and yet was it open to the sort of censure I have indicated. Assuredly it had the prison-aspect; for the dwelling was surrounded with old brick walls, surmounted with a chevaux-de-frise of broken bottles; and there was an iron gate of ponderous aspect to be unlocked and unbolted, besides a nail-studded oaken door to be passed, before Mark Bowring could be considered on the threshold. He asked if Miss Armitage were there, and was shown into the school-room, for the Midsummer holidays had recently commenced, and the babble of many voices was no longer to be heard there.

It was a large low room, and ushered in as he was at one end, while Ruth was seated at the other, he had an opportunity of regarding her for a moment before she perceived him. Her profile only was seen from the door, but he could perceive that she was weeping bitterly and unrestrainedly; yet not indulging in her

grief, but dashing the tears away with her hand that they might not interfere with her employment, which was needlework. The deal table before her was covered with house linen and wearing apparel requiring repairs; and, seated on a stool at her feet, was a quiet little girl of about five years old, who was amusing herself with a doll, and looking up from time to time at Ruth with more of sympathy in her glance than could have been expected from such an infant. It was a motherless child, whose father was abroad; and whose other relatives had no inclination to be troubled with it during the vacation.

It would be vain to attempt a description of the interview between Ruth and her "cousin," as she invariably called him, distant as was their relationship. His appearance before her proved in a moment that he was aware of the circumstances which had occurred so recently; yet which, from their importance, had rounded themselves into a little drama of so momentous

a sort that it seemed difficult to believe it had been completed in less than twenty-four hours. Frank, sincere, affectionate, and inartificial as they both were, no wonder that a barrier seemed broken down by the parts they had respectively played, and that, almost insensibly, they fell into a strain of even closer familiarity than had hitherto existed.

Ruth dried her tears as completely as she was able, yet they would start again when—meekly as she told the tale—she repeated to Mark the manner of Miss Green's reception of her. It appeared that the lady, somewhat mollified by the part-payment of the long-standing debt, had consented to give poor Ruth a shelter; but as the establishment did not stand in need of an additional teacher, while it did require the aid of nimble fingers to repair those dilapidations to which wearing apparel and house-linen are constitutionally liable, Miss Green had proposed, without any needless display of delicacy, that Ruth should fill the office

of needlewoman as a means of "earning her salt."

True is it that the honest, industrious seamstress, who from a sense of duty repeats her daily monotonous toil for the miserable pittance which yet saves her from dependence, is worthy of all respect; yet this very truth could not save Ruth Armitage from the feeling of degradation. The mentally endowed instinctively shrink from mere mechanical toil, just as the artist frets and pines if degraded to the artisan; and perhaps the sorrow at her heart, thus allowed wholly to occupy it, rendered her employment yet more intolerable. What millions of women must have felt—if they have never said—"I am not happy enough to love needlework!"

Quick and ardent as was Mark Bowring, he felt even more intensely than Ruth herself the bitterness of her position; and he spoke his sympathy with an emotion that made his voice falter and his form tremble.

"I feel," said poor Ruth, striving for

composure, and in answer to some exclamation of his, "I feel that perhaps I am wicked to complain, and only idle thus to shrink from my employment."

"Talk not thus, dear Ruth," replied Mark; "you are not wicked—you are not idle. The Creator never placed us here to be content with the evils of our lot, but to exercise our highest faculties by struggling out of them. As for idleness, I have often thought it is a word that should not exist. I believe that inactivity is a semi-death, and the most unnatural condition for living man; depend upon it, they whom we find indolent are almost ever but poor blind and blundering pilgrims, whose individual powers and particular uses have not yet been discovered, who would be happy and busy if they could but find their own proper paths."

"Your words always comfort me, your thoughts always cheer me."

That evening the meeting of a certain

Debating Society, near Euston Square, went off rather flatly, in consequence of the unexpected absence of one of its most popular speakers. Long before the hour at which it had assembled, Mark Bowring and Ruth Armitage had travelled to Shinglebay. The excellent vicar and his wife were taking tea when the old pupil lifted the latch of the garden-gate, and, with his cousin on his arm, claimed their hospitality. The story they had to tell was quickly understood. Ruth was made welcome, with a kindness that resembled parental tenderness; the little sleeping-chamber, which for three years had been occupied by Mark, was made ready for her use; while he, with a manly indifference to the rough accommodation, enjoyed a few hours of sound repose on a couch in Mr. Greyson's library, preparatory to starting townwards by an early morning train.

CHAP. XXI.

A SCENE AT STONELEIGH.

It is time that we return for a little space to the old library at Stoneleigh. Months have passed away, and it is early winter; and those months, seem to have hurried towards its close the span of Mr. Bowring's life. An affliction, the bitterest he has ever known, has fallen on the old man and shaken his sands of time very rudely. Old man every body calls him, and yet his years are not more than the generality of men bear with a vigorous step and a bright eye. But he has let his mind stagnate, and fossilise in its own errors, — the world has so slipped by him, that its concerns rarely interest his soul, or exercise his intellect, except in the case when some strong antago-

nism is excited to unhealthy action,— and the consequence is, that when a strong emotion is aroused, it becomes a master passion. Hence his fiery anger with Mark, for differing from him on, it must be owned, most subjects brought under discussion.

Yet there was one point, on which till within these few days he had firmly believed they were alike and agreed—the sentiment of truth and honour. He now believed Mark to be a reprobate and a felon. We have seen the crime, to which in his desperate need of money, Charton Ridley had had recourse. He had been Mr. Bowring's almost perpetual amanuensis; for a year past he had drawn out every cheque ready for Mr. Bowring's signature, and it was an easy stratagem to write one "pay to my son or bearer," place the figures twenty-five in the corner, and by leaving sufficient margin in the body of the cheque where the amount was written in words, make the additions he *had*

made after the signature was affixed. Yet Mark received his proper quarterly cheque in due time, because it so happened that Charlton Ridley had certain commissions to execute in London for Mr. Bowring, and for their fulfilment he drew out a cheque for twenty-five pounds as for his own use, and substituted one for the other.

This iniquitous action was a desperate cast of the die; true, the forger had a confident hope, that Mr. Bowring would not live till the end of the year, when his cheques would be returned, and knowing himself to be appointed executor to the Will already prepared for signature, the after-game would, in this case, be all in his own hands. But we have seen that he provided for the opposite contingency, by contriving that circumstances, should throw all the appearance of guilt on the discarded son; trusting to his own unscrupulous tactics to fix the shame on the innocent. Another set of circumstances, very

simple in themselves, had disturbed the scheme and hurried on the catastrophe.

Certain law proceedings in which it may be remembered Mr. Bowring was engaged, had come to a compromise rather suddenly; and having lawyers' bills to pay, he *would* give cheques for them, contrary to Charlton's gentle persuasion, on his London instead of his country banker. He thought he was running his balance low,—his drafts were honoured, but he received a polite intimation that he had overdrawn his account! Then came the astounding discovery; but Charlton Ridley was equal to the occasion.

Curious it is to note how often villainy of the deepest dye seems for a time to prosper,—how even the most dangerous obstacles surmounted, appear but stepping-stones to future success. So it was on the present occasion; the immediate effect of the discovery of the altered cheque, being to induce Mr. Bowring to sign that prepared Will by

which nearly the whole of his property was secured to his daughter Lydia, “wife, or affianced wife of Charlton Ridley!” But it is by looking on at what was passing in that library at Stoneleigh, that we shall best judge of the true position of affairs.

It was evening; the “hissing urn” had just been sent away, though one might fancy that the aroma of fine green tea was still perceptible in the room;—a bright fire chiefly of wood glowed in the wide grate, and helped to light the large apartment more effectually than the pair of wax candles which stood on the table. (Wax lights and green tea were necessaries of existence to Mr. Bowring.) The old man reclined in an easy chair, which nearly occupied one side of the fire-place; opposite to him sat Charlton Ridley, likewise in an easy chair; while between them, on a low ottoman carelessly placed, sat Lydia, shielding her face from the fire by a large hand screen; between her and her father

lay Sparkle the spaniel, with nose comfortably pillow'd on his fore paws, and looking an emblem of seriousness and deliberation. Poor Sparkle! his days of puppyhood had long been past, and now he took life with the gravity, becoming a middle-aged dog; seeming, be it noticed, like his noble race in general, even more readily to sympathise with the sorrows of those he loved, than he had ever done with their mirth and gladness. Latterly he had attached himself more than ever to Mr. Bowring, dividing his affection between the old master and the young mistress, in a manner that had something pathetic in it; and when tears flowed from the eyes of either—no uncommon occurrence now—the little animal understood that things were wrong,—and from its uneasy dozings would start with something strangely resembling a human sigh.

Mr. Bowring looks much older than his years. His form is shrunk, and his clothes hang upon

him “a world too wide.” His little remaining hair is perfectly white; his face is full of lines and wrinkles; and the droop of the lip would show a physiognomist that deep sorrow has lately had its home there; yet there is determination left in the brow and eye, shaping itself into a sort of hard doggedness, that one would wish to see broken up.

Neither has time dealt quite gently with Lydia. She is scarcely more than five or six and twenty—that age when, if there be a full fine mind, and a soul radiant with happiness to light up the outer shrine, a woman’s beauty seems only bursting into fuller richness; but if heart-ache, self-reproach, or even worldly care has been a dweller there, we may be sure a tribute has been paid; for tears wash away bloom, and delve the channel for wrinkles. Grief is the most inexorable tax-gatherer from beauty; and happiness had been to Lydia Bowring, at most, a three days’ guest, coming to her at long intervals. “Woman’s love” has

been alternately so be-rhymed and ridiculed, so truly glorified in the realities of life, so grandly idealised on the poet's page, and so dragged in the mire of bathos by rapid writers of the intense school, that it is almost daring to say another word on the worn subject. And yet, in this "Woman's Book," I cannot forbear.

I say, it is a fearful thing for woman to be taught—as is she not?—that love must be a greater and more ruling circumstance in her life than in the life of man; I say such teaching brings about—as many a prophecy has done—the dark fulfilment of the oracle: it weakens all the supports of character, and inclines her over the precipice, from which she might have recoiled, or whose brink even she might have skirted unharmed. Constancy is very generally esteemed a virtue; but is it not sometimes a vice? Is there any virtue in a woman clinging—while happily they have not yet been made one—to a man after she has discovered that his

moral nature is lower than her own? In the end she must sink to his level—for the weak cannot lift the strong; and every hour that she does not strive to loosen her bonds, they grow the tighter, dragging her earthward. Women, in the mass, are dreadful cowards—in all but their own silent bravery of endurance; but they are cowards only, because, from a matchless and persevering system they are taught from the cradle, to be such. Their will, instead of being strengthened and nobly directed, is continually being bent and broken; they are perpetually taught to yield blindly, and submit meekly; to lean on others for opinions, and hardly exercise the noble faculty of decision in a graver matter than the choice of a ribbon. Thus, how can they be expected to have the will, the decision, the courage—to tear themselves from an unworthy support, and, by inflicting a sharp, present pang, make possible a happy or a peaceful future! O Love, Love! the dream of youth, the one reality of existence; when it rises on the

horizon of life, it should be but the glittering portal to the holier, grander, dearer, temple of which it forms a part—domestic happiness! A portal which man and woman should pass together in equal purity—in equal earnestness—in equal faith—in equal affection—in mutual dependence; and *then* the temple that they enter would indeed prove one whence the holy worship of a generous, useful life would henceforth ascend. They who would still keep woman as the supplementary half of human nature, little know the dragon's teeth of error and misery they are sowing.

Briefly as I can make them, let these truths apply to Lydia Bowring. She had loved, she did love, her cousin Charlton Ridley, with the deep sole devotion of an ardent nature. Her love—not devoid of that passionate intensity which Shakspere has, of all poets, the most perfectly portrayed as allied to womanly purity—was as a high tide that had flooded her soul; but in that flood, so unresisted by her will, it

had brought sharp agonies. Once her heart had demanded that she should be loved, even with truth and fervour, and tenderness like to the elements of her own passion: but as the conviction had grown upon her that Charlton was incapable of such devotion, that eager demand had faded to wild wishes—the wishes to vague hope; the hope to a dull, resigned content that he should love her at all—should tolerate her affection. Cruelly well the heartless man knew his dreadful influence! And he looked on in the same spirit as that of a stern anatomist who watches some torturing vivisection, to observe the phenomena. By turns half indifferent, and, when the shadow of an opportunity occurred, absurdly jealous; always exacting. Sometimes by the easy trick of flattery and protestation, playing the ardent lover, and reserving for rare and chief occasions the master *coup* of soft ineffable tenderness—he was the veriest tyrant to whom a hapless girl ever bent her neck for the yoke.

It would be terrible to relate the mental struggles of Lydia Bowring. She knew—and what is more in her inner heart, she felt, that the alienation of her brother from his father's house, and the usurpation of his rights, was a wrong in the sight of God ; she had interceded —she had argued—not, be it remembered, with her father, but with Charlton Ridley — and always convinced, as it were, against her will, had yielded. She would not have dared to say a word to her own father that Charlton would have disapproved ; and this he knew. So cunningly had he worked on her by reproaches—regrets—blandishments !

The trio, as I have said, were seated round the fire in the old library at Stoneleigh.

“ Right, right,” murmured Mr. Bowring, in a tone that showed some exciting conversation had already taken place ; “ right, quite right to forbid him coming here. If he had avowed his crime, if he had been penitent, I might have borne it—but to deny—to act the

part of injured innocence, it is monstrous—monstrous!"

"You remember, sir," said Charlton, "that you expressly forbade me making, in my interview with this unhappy young man, any express accusation—and in your letter, you only made the appeal to his conscience, and demanded that it alone should be his accuser."

"Yes, yes," resumed the old man; "because as you justly said, it was dreadful—even in private speech—to connect such a deed with the name of a Mark Bowring. I cannot speak it—and with my consent it never shall be spoken—my father's name—an honourable name for four generations—" and he bent his head upon his trembling hands, and fairly wept aloud.

"I may have been severe," he continued; "I have sometimes thought it would have been wiser to have yielded a little more—but this last iniquity proves that I was right—proves that there is no virtue—no principle in the school of reprobates to which he belongs. I

have cast him off, now, and for ever—let him marry the little beggar, and take her to a garret if he chooses."

"I fear it will come to this," said Ridley ; "though perhaps not at present. I dare say her name would not have been mentioned ; but for his artifice of pretending that the only fault of which his 'conscience' accused him, was the impossibility, *now*, of giving a promise that you once very nearly solicited—a promise that he would not marry Ruth Armitage. He denied that he was pledged to her ; but he refused to promise that he never would be—evidence, I fear, but too conclusive of his disobedient intentions."

"Disobedient no longer," cried Mr. Bowring ; "for I have ceased to command—almost ceased to desire anything about him, save that he may not bring public disgrace upon my name. He may marry whom he pleases ; you may tell him this—yes, tell him so—tell him so—" and the old man muttered the last words over and

over again ; then with a gesture of weariness and fatigue, he turned to Lydia, and asked her to ring the bell, saying, “ I will go to bed now—it is time for me—you need not hurry—yet don’t sit late ; let the house be still in good time, that I may try to sleep.”

Both Charlton and Lydia helped him up the stairs, and the latter entered his chamber to ascertain that his fire was good, and that the hundred little requirements of an invalid were in readiness. Then she kissed his cheek, received a kind “ God bless you,” which somehow seemed to pain, rather than comfort her ; and leaving her father to be assisted by his favourite servant, she returned to the library.

CHAP. XXII.

THE CAPTIVE FLUTTERS IN THE TOIL.

CHARLTON RIDLEY was standing in a thoroughly free and easy attitude, with his back to the fire, when Lydia entered the room. Probably his ease of manner was infinitely greater than his ease of mind ; for a gentleman largely in debt—with only very precarious present means, and his future fortune resting on marriage (to be sure he had no capricious spoiled child to deal with—but as he had emphatically said, “a woman in love”)—and a gentleman, moreover, guilty of a certain act, among others of as morally dark a dye, which might brand him as a felon, could not one must suppose have quite a tranquil mind. However this might be, he lifted

the dark locks—which seemed to have fallen more than was usual over his brow—as Lydia turned the handle of the door, and approaching her with extended arms, clasped her towards him, and claimed a kiss. She gave it frankly, and sincerely, but she unwound his arm from her waist; and sinking into a chair, gave free vent to the tears, that a more observant lover (?) would have known had long been ready to flow.

“O Charlton,” she exclaimed, “I cannot but feel for my poor brother—I am wretched about him—and I have received a letter from him—which makes me yet more miserable.”

“Have you shown it to your father?” asked Charlton, quickly.

“No; because I promised to leave the affair entirely in your hands.”

“Darling Lydia!” and he raised and kissed the hand which had lain listlessly in her lap.

“But dear Charlton—he ought to see it; in justice to Mark he ought.”

"Let me read it dearest, and then we can decide."

"Shall I read it to you?" said Lydia, drawing the letter from her pocket, and speaking in a beseeching manner. Perhaps instinctively she desired to emphasise certain passages.

"No—no—let me have it," and Charlton took it from her hand, without waiting for further arguments. She remained silent, while he read four closely written pages; from time to time looking up in his face—but for these glances we may be well assured, Mr. Charlton Ridley was perfectly prepared.

When he had quite finished, he said, very calmly, still holding the letter in his hand, "Well, what is all this, but a repetition of what he said to me?"

"It seems much more," murmured Lydia.

"In what respect? Did I not tell you this stupid story about the little governess?"

"But not so fully, Charlton. It may be a foolish and unfortunate acquaintance, as the

world would say; but I cannot help thinking that my brother shows a fine chivalric feeling in determining to stand by this poor girl and uphold her respectability, since he was the cause of her disgrace. His own description of the whole affair seems to me so straight-forward and honest, that I cannot help feeling he is right. His taking her to Shinglebay, and placing her under the protection of Mrs. Greyson, was so proper, so thoughtful; his whole conduct is so much more unselfish than what one expects from a young man —.”

“What do you know about the conduct of young men?” interrupted Charlton, in that tone of half-sarcasm which was intended to confuse his companion. It had the desired effect; it brought a blush to Lydia’s cheek, and fresh tears to her eyes.

“Only what every one says,” stammered Lydia. “But Charlton,” she continued, “I cannot believe that Mark has been guilty of the crime—for it is nothing less—of which he

is accused ; I have a conviction—and it is stronger than any reasoning—that he is innocent. Let me show this letter to my father? Let Mark, at any rate, know of what it is he is accused.”

“Did I not tell you,” said Charlton, with warmth, “that when I saw him, by your father’s wish, I all but stated the fact. I asked him, if he remembered receiving a cheque, in the Summer, and what he did with it ; he affected surprise at the question, and answered that of course he took it to the bank to be cashed. Surely this was conclusive that it could not be altered by any intermediate hand. Depend upon it, he would only stand to the falsehood, and thus enrage your father still more. It is this conviction that makes me so readily acquiesce in my poor uncle’s wishes.”

“And yet,” continued Lydia, “such strange things do occur, that it seems to me only mere justice that Mark should hear the accusation that is made : there would be no need to have

any public exposure—no need to say another word to the bankers. You know my father will never dispute the cheque; it is the cheat, the deception, not the loss of the money, that afflicts him."

"The fact is, Lydia," said Charlton; and as he spoke he took her hand, and looked a sort of sorrowful rebuking tenderness, "the fact is, are you, or am I, to take the helm in this miserable business?" .

For answer, poor Lydia burst into a passion of tears. Stormy exhibitions of emotion were not common with her; but she could not now control her bitter sorrow. "O Charlton!" she exclaimed, "*I* wish to take the helm! *I* wish to govern you! When the whole purpose of my life is to yield to—to please you! But this is a point of conscience—a something which rests between Heaven and me. I feel that God must turn His face from me for ever, if I forsake my brother thus; if I join in the injustice towards him! O Charlton! dearest, dearest,

let me send this letter to poor Mark," and she drew a folded paper from her bosom. " See, I have written one in answer to his ; but I would not seal it, I would not send it without your sanction. Let me sue, as I would if I were already your wife : on my kness, I ask you, dearest, dearest Charlton, let me send it !" and the wretched, pride-broken, sorrow-stricken girl threw herself at his feet.

" Rise !" said her tyrant ; and well he knew that his words would pierce her heart like cold steel. " Rise, Miss Bowring ! this is no attitude for you. As you wish my opinion of your letter I will read it, if you choose."

" O Charlton !" they were the only words she could utter, but she put the unsealed letter which she had prepared into his hands, and, sinking into the large arm-chair which Mr. Bowring had lately occupied, hid the anguish of her countenance on the back of it.

Need it be said, that the letter penned from

the impulse of her own heart, in reply to her brother's, was sisterly and straight-forward, and altogether of such a character that, had it been received by Mark, it must have led to explanations which would very speedily have cut the Gordian knot of his wrongs.

Charlton Ridley changed colour as he perused it; he was actually disconcerted, for never before had Lydia displayed such determination, such emotion. It seemed as if a new spirit possessed her. Had anger been his policy, he would have called her "Lioness," for the word was between his set teeth; but he drove it back, knowing well that he had a power mightier than anger at his command: yet, he vowed a silent vow, that in future years he would bring her to bay for this opposition.

"You wish to send this letter?" he said, with the same cold indifference that he had used before.

Lydia turned towards him as if a ray of hope were lighting her soul. "O Charlton! if you

would but let me—if you would but willingly consent?"

"You are your own mistress, and can do as you please, Miss Bowring," and he tossed the letter across the table. Lydia took it up—she read it through. There must have been some simple, natural pathos in that sisterly letter; for, as she re-read her own composition, her tears flowed more and more freely.

Charlton Ridley rose, walked leisurely to the other end of the room, lighted a chamber candle, arranged the extinguisher in its place with deliberate care, trimmed the wick to a point of precision, and then, making a cold, formal bow, said, "Good night, Madam."

A cry—half-shriek, half-sob—burst from Lydia. Tortured to the quick, she was like those miserable ones, who, on the rack, have learnt at last to do their torturers' bidding. She started from her chair, she flung the offending letter into the fire, where it flamed for a moment, and then fluttered, half-consumed,

to the hearth—emblem of a fair intent most foully marred—and then, springing towards the door, she intercepted Charlton Ridley.

“Pity me!” she murmured, her whole frame drooping in her anguish; “one word of kindness before you go; your coldness kills me. See, I have yielded; I will yield to you always, only forgive me.”

Forgive! Yes, as the “Lioness” was “tamed” she was to be “forgiven,” and coaxed, and caressed; and a very different reply to the brother’s letter arranged for the morrow’s writing!

Notwithstanding Mr. Bowring’s injunctions, it was so much past his hour for retiring when Lydia and Charlton separated, that they respectively passed his chamber-door on tip-toe.

Does it seem that Lydia’s good angel had deserted her, because she had been vanquished in this cruel fight? It may be not; and that to the clear eyes which shine from heaven, the struggle had itself been a victory, and a preparation for fiercer battle, and more enduring triumph.

CHAP. XXIII.

THE SHADOW OF COMING EVENTS.

It was a week later in the year, but by one of the caprices of our much-abused climate, the weather had grown milder and brighter; and as Shinglebay was always a warmer, sunnier spot than Stoneleigh, the contrast between the two was proportionately striking. The fine old trees round about the vicarage, had not yet doffed the golden glory of their autumn suit; a few prim dahlias and late carnations still bloomed in the garden; hardy china roses put out their blossoms on the south wall of the house; and showy chrysanthemums, promised by their clustering buds, a bright display for the dull days of December. In the distance,

lay the ocean, a purple mass, lightly ploughed by the wind, rather than cleft into billows. Fishermen were putting out to sea in little fleets, their white or tawny sails gleaming in the sunshine, and their prows dipping with graceful curtseys to the breeze; while towards the horizon, waving feathers of smoke told their story of passing steam ships, freighted with life, hope, wealth and power. Above spread a few fleecy clouds, and a blue sky, bright and clear, yet looking as the winter sky always does, nearer than the more transparent arch of summer.

Our old acquaintance, Ruth Armitage, is flitting about Mrs. Greyson's pretty little garden; but such a change has come over her, that she almost needs to be re-introduced. Her step is light and quick, for she has the pace of the active, and the happy; she looks taller, for her head is thrown back, now that she has tossed off her load of humiliation; perfect health impresses its own beautiful signet on

her cheek ; and a light of happiness is in her eyes, that shows its reality very often in the glisten of a joyous tear. Mr. and Mrs. Greyson have adopted her for their daughter, until "Love" or "Death" do "them part!"

She is only gathering a few flowers for Mrs Greyson's work-table, but the manner in which she performs this simple task, carries a sort of home atmosphere with it. A garden bonnet taken from its peg in the lobby, accommodates itself from habit to a mass of curls, that for the formal promenade require much closer adjustment ; a garden shawl is crossed round her slight figure, and tied—the ends out of her way—in a thick knot behind ; garden gloves protect her fair hands, as with her garden scissors, she appropriates the brightest flowers she can find ; and her very nice merino dress is tucked up Goody-Two-shoe's fashion, out of the way of damp borders. In a little while, she has quite a showy nosegay, but on her way to the house, she looks in on the poultry yard to ascertain

that the chickens have been fed ; and here she is affectionately assaulted by Hector, the huge Newfoundland dog, who, as she stoops to pat him, stretches his chain to its full extent, puts his great paws on her shoulders, and for his morning salutation, knocks back the garden bonnet till it hangs like a hood from her neck. Even Hector considers her one of the family, as a stranger might see.

Leaving her garden equipments in the hall, she arranged her flowers in a vase already prepared, and carried them to the little drawing room, where, on a sofa drawn near the window, reclined the invalid lady.

“Thank you, my love,” said Mrs. Greyson, half rising to admire the flowers ; “what! mignonette, still! Is it your management of the garden, or what, that persuades the flowers to stay with us so long?”

“The lovely weather, dear aunty,” (this was the name, that somehow or other had been dropped into—the formal “Mrs.” seemed so

cold to both parties) ; “ it is the lovely weather, that keeps the flowers with us so long. Indeed, aunty, you should go out this morning—it would do you so much good—do let me take you a ride? I know Mr. Greyson is too busy to go; but you know I can drive old Madge beautifully, and Hector is begging so hard for a run. I can fetch down your cloak and warm boots, and everything you want, so that you shall not be the least bit tired in the world.”

“ We must go out, by and bye,” said Mrs. Greyson, “ for there is a letter from Mark this morning ; he is coming down to us for a day or two, and we may as well go and meet him at the station.”

Ruth clapped her hands with a child-like gesture ; her spirits were so high—what with the home-happiness so newly tasted, and the exhilarating weather,—that this news seemed an overflowing drop of joy ; and yet some strange consciousness flushed her cheek with a deeper

rose the next moment, and for a little while she was speechless. At last she broke the silence by a mere common place, and her voice seemed to have changed its tone, as she said—“Is my cousin quite well?”

“I hope so. It is a very short letter—read it, my dear, if you like. I fear, however, something has vexed him, from what he says about his anxiety to have our advice.”

“What a happiness,” exclaimed Ruth, “that he has such friends to consult! Poor Mark!” she continued, “I wonder what has happened; I am sure they are not kind to him at home—I am certain of it, though he never says a word that is disrespectful of his father and sister. But they don’t know him as we do—do they, aunty?—they don’t know how clever, and industrious and good he is, or they never would cross him in the manner they do.”

“Poor boy!” said Mrs. Greyson, “his is a strange and painful position.”

“I never will believe it is his fault,” con-

tinued Ruth, who by this time had seated herself on a low stool near the sofa, and was busy cutting the leaves of a new magazine, which she had taken from the table, "he is so unselfish, so kind-hearted, so ready to give way to the pleasure of others—and I may add, so respectful to the opinions of his elders—at least, towards you and Mr. Greyson, I am sure he is—don't you think so?"

"Because, my dear girl, we thoroughly understand him; and because we sympathise with all his sentiments, even when we differ from him sometimes in opinion. But even this is not often; for we look at life from the same point of view—that is, as much so, as the young and middle-aged can possibly do."

"I know the secret, dear aunty," said Ruth, looking up to Mrs. Greyson with beaming eyes, and pressing her hand as she spoke, "the secret of that sympathy—it is because you are Good!—because you are free from the plots and the plans of worldly people—because you

always do the right, and let the future work itself out as it may — because you never listen to the preachings of expediency — this is how it is that you sympathise with Cousin Mark. Since I have been so blessed as to call this my happy home, I have learned to see many things more clearly than I ever did before: and among others, that thoroughly *good* people always agree together, even when one is rich, and the other poor — one old, and the other young — one learned, and the other ignorant — they can't seriously differ — they must draw together, and love each other.”

“ Hush, my love ; if Mr. Greyson were here, he would scold you for this sort of adulation.”

“ But his scoldings are so kind, that a scolding for what I have said, would only make me more convinced that it is quite true.”

“ To follow out your argument,” said Mrs. Greyson, with a smile, “ as we don't quarrel with you, I suppose Ruth Armitage is a very good person, too.”

"O I did not think that," replied Ruth, with a mounting blush, "not for a moment; but this I may own, that the strength of your goodness seems to draw me towards it. All the teaching in the world could never be to me what your rare example has been; I used, in my miserable days, which seem such a long long time ago, to be envious of the happy—to murmur wickedly at my trials, and, even if I did not show that I was ill-tempered, often and often to feel so."

"You were sorely tried, my poor girl," said Mrs. Greyson affectionately; "and it is a great joy to me to find you are happy with us. Great worldly prosperity, no doubt, brings its peculiar trials and temptations; but early struggles are perhaps more perilous. When the character is formed, the shocks of fortune may lay it bare to the world, but are little likely to alter it; in early youth, one dreads that the tree may be fatally warped and bent. You have heard Mr. Greyson hold this argument even from

the pulpit, when he has been pleading the orphans' cause."

"If Mark were a rich man," said Ruth, "how earnestly he would enter into Mr. Greyson's philanthropic schemes!"

"I believe it;—but your cousin has greater power than money could ever be to him. He has talents, which, it appears to us, he desires most nobly to employ."

"And because he refuses to direct them in the beaten track of the learned professions, or to enter the army, or navy, his father all but discards him."

"It is very sad."

"And yet," continued Ruth, with growing enthusiasm—"and yet I feel that he is right. All history—all experience—don't laugh, dear aunty, you know I have had a great deal of experience, considering that I am still in my teens—everything that is passing around shows that this is an age in which talent *should* strike out new paths. Mark feels that he has certain

things to do in the world, old arguments to rebut, and new ones to elaborate; he may not yet see how he will reach the goal he has set before him, but he will never turn his face away from it—that, I know. O if Mr. Greyson were but his father; or, if old Mr. Bowering were but like your dear husband, how happy my cousin would be, cheered on, approved in his course, instead of being thwarted, reviled, and sometimes made miserable—I do think ——”

“Ruth!” cried a voice from the next room—it was Mr. Greyson’s—“ask aunty if she can spare you for half an hour; and, if she can, I know you will be good-natured enough to copy three or four letters for me.”

“Directly, dear sir,” and Ruth sprang from her low seat, a look having conveyed Mrs. Greyson’s entire concurrence. It was delightful to Ruth Armitage to feel herself of use; to perform the little filial, confidential offices which were daily required from her; and from

each of which seemed to emanate some portion of that “home atmosphere,” which made her so intensely happy.

In a few minutes after Ruth left the room, Mr. Greyson entered it, and carefully closing the door, said, in rather a low voice, as he approached his wife—

“I was glad to find our little puss half an hour’s employment, just to break the thread of your discourse.”

“Did you hear it, then?” asked Mrs. Greyson, with a smile.

“Every word; for you seemed never to observe that the door between the two rooms was wide open—and I plead guilty, my darling, to having listened. In another minute you would have been—to speak nautically—in a most perilous navigation; between the Scylla of over-strained obedience to a wrong-headed father, and the Charybdis of open rebellion. That young Bowring will never be wrecked on the rock, I am sure—but let us keep him in

the open sea a little longer, if we can ; and not absolutely advocate the rebellion, as our little Ruth was on the point of asking you to do."

"Every day convinces me," said Mrs. Greyson, after a moment's musing, "that we are right in our opinion about these dear young people."

"I believe so," returned her husband ; "and while I certainly shall avoid any conduct which is likely to precipitate a declaration, or an engagement between them, I shall equally refrain from taking any step to estrange, or separate two hearts so worthy of each other."

"My own Walter ! It would break my heart to find years rob you of your first youthful generous feelings ; or, to see the snow that is whitening your brown locks, creeping onwards to chill your heart. It seems like the renewal of our youth, to trace our own early emotions thus existing over again in these two dear children."

“Or is it the truth,” said Mr. Greyson, with a beaming smile, “that we are a couple of silly romantic old folks, that have somehow or other omitted to gather the wisdom becoming our years.”

“Well, shall we throw away our romance, and take to worldly wisdom?—Shall we sell our ‘old lamps’ for ‘new’? I am ready if you are.”

“That ‘if’ is a most saving word!” and, as Mr. Greyson spoke, he stooped down, and by a kiss on his wife’s forehead, expressed something more than common speech might have done. “After all,” he continued, “seriously speaking, I feel it neither a duty, nor a vocation to thwart these two young hearts; they have much to answer for, who, on the threshold of a Life oppose a worthy and a virtuous attachment.”

CHAP. XXIV.

AN AFTER-DINNER GOSSIP.

FEW of us are there who, as our long northern winter rolls by, do not sigh for the bright spring and the soft summer ; and yet there is a vast enjoyment, a sort of yearly renewed freshness in the early days of winter, the first recognition of the really long evenings, the candle-light dinners, and the gathering round an English hearth — a something in its way almost as exhilarating as sunshine itself. Now it was early winter that day at the Parsonage ; and though as we have seen the morning had been bright and warm, the close of the day was chilly enough to render a glowing fire the point of attraction. Mark had been duly met at the

station ; and as, after a cordial greeting from his dear friends, he took the reins from Ruth, old Madge pricked up her ears at his remembered touch and voice, and stepped out bravely with her additional burthen. Hector bounded backwards and forwards, kicking up the dust in their faces, as an eccentric demonstration of his delight, and making the railway arches ring to his quick deep bark. Mark had many anxieties at his heart ; but the old glow of happiness came back, as he felt himself again with those who loved him best ; even the recognition of his four-footed friends spoke a hearty welcome.

Dinner had been nicely timed to follow Mark's arrival ; and when the cloth was removed, the little party drew round from the table to take their dessert by the fire. Ruth was something more silent than usual, but being at no time precisely a chatterbox, a little shade of reserve passed unnoticed. Mark had observed the improvement in her appear-

ance, and had expressed his delight and admiration simply but earnestly. The echo—no, not that—rather the dictating spirit of his words, had sunk into her heart, and was making such sweet music there, that she could not but listen. Hence her quieter mood.

Meanwhile, it was with a subdued sorrow, a sort of habitual regret, that Mark spoke of the yet deepened estrangement between himself and his father. All regrets that are not sharpened and kept alive by remorse, calm down in time; and, for Mark's especial sorrow, he had the balm of a clear conscience.

"You know, dear friends," he exclaimed, addressing Mr. and Mrs. Greyson; "you know what a grief my father's displeasure has been to me; but I am growing used to my sad burthen. A year ago, it would almost have broken my heart to have been forbidden my father's house, and for no cause that I am able to trace; now, I rise up against the blow, and am by no means sure that I am not the braver

and stronger, and, certainly the more eager for independence from it."

"It will not be always thus," said Mrs. Greyson; "you are the victim of some strange misapprehension, and Mr. Bowring will yet awaken to the truth, of this I am sure."

"I trust—I pray so," sighed Mark; "meanwhile, I must endure the calumny in whatever it exists, and so live as to give my father no real ground of complaint. Perhaps the sharpest pang I have felt was on receiving this cold letter from my sister, in answer to one written in a kinder spirit," and he handed his friends the letter, which, the reader will remember, was dictated by Charlton Ridley.

"It is indeed cold and unsisterly," they both exclaimed, after reading it carefully.

"And decided in its tone, is it not?" continued Mark, perhaps a little bitterly. "I am distinctly told that I may do what I like in the world, provided I do not molest—that is the word—molest my father."

"And what shall you do, my dear boy?" asked Mrs. Greyson, tenderly.

"Strive," replied Mark, "to lead a noble useful life, and thus break down this cruel prejudice against me; but it is about some of the details of my career that I wish, my kindest and best friends, to consult you. You know that I have finished my course at the University; but you do not know that since I saw you, I have been delivering lectures at a Mechanics' Institution, and, if I were to believe flatterers, should tell you that I am growing popular among my hearers."

The last words were spoken gaily, with that laughing irony which takes away the pomp of self-laudation, and yet conveys a truth.

"I congratulate you," said Mr. Greyson, cordially, and yet with a smile; "and pray," he added, "on what topics have you been enlightening the world?"

"Hitherto, I have taken epochs in Literature, and illustrated, to the best of my poor ability,

the influence of the writers of a period on their age. The theme is well nigh inexhaustible ; and if, from the teachings of the past, I lead even a few persons to draw lessons for the present, my labours will not have been quite in vain."

"Are you paid for lecturing?" asked Mrs. Greyson, who, like most women, had a thorough appreciation of pounds, shillings and pence.

"Generally," replied Mark, "but not always. Where an institution is rich and can afford to pay, I stipulate for good terms ; but under certain circumstances I give my aid. Ah ! how delightful it would be to be rich, to throw all one's energies into noble channels, without a thought of personal recompense!"

"If I live to see you rich," said Mr. Greyson, "I shall remind you of these words!"

"And so will I, dear," exclaimed his wife, "provided Mark needs reminding. But I do not think riches would change his nature, or that he would become their slave, instead of

making them his. There is nothing," she continued, warming with her subject, "there is nothing to me so incomprehensible as the lives that a large proportion of rich people lead. For what should money be valued?"

"Chiefly, I think," said Mark, "because its possession relieves one from the necessity of thinking about it."

"Exactly," replied Mrs. Greyson, "and leaves the mind free for nobler occupation. Now, the dreadful blunder so many rich people make—mind I do not say all—seems to me to be this. They are always rushing after a something which they call happiness, but which is like the Dead Sea apple when they reach it. They set before them some selfish pleasure, some personal gratification, which has looked very charming in the distance, but which affording but a brief enjoyment is sure to disappoint. Then they shake their heads very solemnly, and tell poor people that riches do not make hap-

piness. If they would but cease to think about their money and their own satisfaction, but 'find' some noble work and 'do it'—look out for the duties which lie thick about them, and fulfil them simply and unostentatiously, they would find——”

“Blessings germinate in the most unpromising soil,” interrupted Mr. Greyson, “and happiness floating like an incense around them! that is what you mean, Lucy, is it not? Really, darling, to hear you talk of the duties of the rich, few persons would think you had lately received a legacy—and that we are now great capitalists,” he added, laughing: “did we tell Mark of it?”

“I think not. A dear friend of early life, though one from whom I have been years separated, bequeathed me three thousand pounds two months ago; and it was on this event you must know, that instead of following out my great theory, I snatched at a near gratification, which however has *not*

proved a cheat, but *has* brought me happiness. But for this legacy, which affords a provision for the future, we might not have thought ourselves justified, in withdrawing our pet from the rough path of self-sustaining industry." As Mrs. Greyson spoke, she took Ruth's hand in both of her's, and though for a moment no one answered, all understood the delicacy of the allusion.

Presently the tears gushed from the young girl's eyes, and dropping her head on Mrs. Greyson's shoulder, poor Ruth ejaculated in broken phrase—

"I am so—so happy—I had been so used to sorrow—that now—now—when I wake in the morning, it is a little while before I can believe that this is my own—own happy home."

"There, dear girl, dry your eyes—you know these lords of the creation hate tears."

"Do they," said Ruth, trying to smile; "I cannot help it if I have given them offence."

Perhaps Mr. Greyson showed his anger by one or two wretched attempts at wit; but *bon mots* were not his forte; while Mark hid his face with an old newspaper which he was apparently greatly enjoying, though reading it upside down. After a little while, it was he who changed the conversation, by saying, "I am sure you remember my dear old nurse, Morris?"

"Yes, well," replied Mrs. Greyson; "the good old body, I have often thought of her; I suppose you see her, or hear from her sometimes?"

"Yes, I took care not to lose sight of her a second time; but poor Mossy is not very fond of letter-writing, and would rather, at any time, walk seven miles to see 'her boy,' than write him seven lines. She has been living with a relation in the country lately, but she came up to town last week, with the view of obtaining a situation as sick-nurse; she fancies her age and experience render her very fit for

such an employment, and she says her heart will not endure any more sunderings from children, after she has had time to grow attached to them. Poor Mossy!—if ever I am rich, she shall live with me. Of course, she came to see me, and, on her way, she met with rather a singular adventure."

"Indeed—what was that?"

"You have often heard me speak of my sister's relations, the Ridleys. Mr. Ridley, though hardly yet an old man, has been for years in wretched health, so much so, that I was quite surprised to hear that Morris had met him in an omnibus, coming from the city. It seems that her attention was drawn to him in the first instance, by observing that he was an invalid—a premonition of her future duties perhaps making her quick at noticing slight signs—and some civility on her part, such as drawing up or down a window, occasioned them to look full at each other. It must be many years since they met; I almost wonder

Mr. Ridley remembered her—but, to be sure, she was Lydia's nurse before she was mine; and I believe, before I was born, used frequently to be with my sister in Russell Square."

"I have heard Morris speak of Mr. Ridley," said Ruth; "even when I knew her, there was a certain, faded, old-fashioned shawl in existence, which she used to speak of as twenty years old—as the present of Mr. Ridley to her on some birthday occasion; and which, I can assure you, she still thought beautiful, and prized highly."

"That was just like Mossy; she never forgot a kindness. It seems, she told Mr. Ridley her object in coming to London, and asked him if he had any influence that might introduce her to the sad employment she has chosen. He told her that he had no influence with the medical profession, but that, unhappily, the son of Mr. Grieves, his oldest friend, was lying in the last stage of a dangerous illness, and that the family were in imme-

diate need of just such a nurse for him as Morris."

"Poor parents!" ejaculated Mrs. Greyson, "how dreadful it must be for them, to see a child thus sinking before their eyes."

"He is a grown man," said Mark, "of six or seven and twenty; I remember Julian Grieves years ago, he was Charlton Ridley's school-fellow and most intimate companion. Poor young man, it must be hard to bow submissively, and relinquish life, so newly enjoyed!"

"And yet," said Mr. Greyson, "I have stood by the bed-side of the young, who were already weary of life; and whose souls were exalted, through perfect faith, into rapture at the approaching dissolution! May it be so, Mark, with your young acquaintance!"

"I pray that it may, and I am not the less hopeful, because the last time I was at Stoneleigh, I chanced to hear that he and Charlton Ridley were less intimate than they used to be,

Is it not sad, Mr. Greyson," he continued, after a pause, "to know that my sister is betrothed to the only enemy I have in the world; for, that Charlton Ridley is my foe, even you, dear sir, I think, can hardly doubt?"

"Man proposes, and God disposes," said Mr. Greyson, very gravely, "and the end not yet."

CHAP. XXV.

A DECLARATION.

EVENTS which prove themselves the turning points of life often hinge on trifling circumstances—on those little unforeseen occurrences which we are accustomed to call “accidents.” Thus the casualty of Mrs. Greyson’s suffering from the fatigue and pleasant excitement of the previous day, and consequently keeping her room until late in the afternoon, threw Mark Bowring and Ruth Armitage very much more tête-à-tête together than could otherwise have happened. Mr. Greyson was busily engaged in his pastoral duties, and as rest and silence are the best curatives of a nervous headache,

his wife declined even her dear Ruth's companionship.

It was a bright clear morning, like its predecessor ; but Ruth refused to stroll farther than the garden, lest she should be wanted at home ; and Mark declined a solitary walk, even to his beloved Shinglebay. So when each gravel path had been duly traversed, and the last lingering flowers duly noticed, the young people returned to that pleasant, sunny sitting-room which has been more than once mentioned. No wonder that the calm, sincere regard Mark Bowring had so long cherished for the struggling, unprotected girl, had latterly deepened in character ; and no wonder, that even within the last twenty-four hours it had grown more intense and more defined. Defined, because Mark was a great deal too right-minded, and clear-headed to attempt the absurdity of self-deception. Surely there is a vast deal of nonsense written about people "not being aware" of the state of their own affections till "hope-

lessly entangled," or till some unpremeditated scene brings matters to a crisis! On the contrary, I fancy, there are few mental emotions, which bring with them so distinct a consciousness of their existence, as does the growth of a pure passion—a true Heart-love. Thus, when Mark had refused to promise that he would never pledge himself to Ruth Armitage, he had already suspected to what his regard was tending; and when he had received the very distinct and explicit permission to wed whom he pleased, he had been conscious of a sweet, amid all the bitterness of that message. But now, no lingering doubt was left; and with a tremor that made him positively awkward, and a wild fitful beating at his heart, that sometimes impeded his utterance, he felt alike constrained in her presence, yet drawn as by a magnet to her side. He knew that he loved her as the One Woman the world contained for him—the Eve of that Paradise in which it is given every true, pure, young heart awhile to wander!

Admiration is a strong element of love; and really there seemed no end of the qualities which Mark found to admire in Ruth Armitage. Certainly, few persons would have thought of calling her pretty—she seemed so much more; for though she had delicate features, and the witchery of youth was still hers, the expression of her countenance radiant with happiness, truth, and refined intelligence, was that which first attracted a stranger. Her deep blue eyes were soft and yet sparkling, as if they were lighted up by happy and beautiful thoughts—yet withal, so sustained by truth and innocence, that I know not the look beneath which they would have quailed. Then she had the rich rare gift of a sweet-speaking voice, and a natural elegance of movement and gesture, that, refined by the excellent society in which she had latterly moved, and yet more by the consciousness of a right position, had mellowed into something which seemed the very type of the true gentlewoman.

Some morning visitors were announced, and it was at first a sort of ecstasy of delight for Mark Bowring to watch Ruth's kind cordiality, and her graceful reception of them ; but, presently, a sharp pang of jealousy disturbed him, and showed how fearful a torturer that passion must be. The young visitors were the son and daughter of a neighbouring baronet, intimate friends of the Greysons, aye, and of Ruth too. The young ladies were evidently "girl-friends," cordially and unfeignedly glad to meet, and Ruth's open, affectionate manner made Mark perfectly envious ; the brother, a younger son, and mere stripling, appeared by no means insensible to Ruth's attractions, if one might judge from his attentions, for he had brought her a magnificent bouquet from his father's conservatory, and some choice *morceau* of unpublished music, which he had "copied for Miss Armitage from the note-book of a German friend." The brother and sister had walked over to the Parsonage, to practise some

duets and trios with their young friend ; but as Mrs. Greyson's indisposition prevented the accomplishment of this design, they chatted for about half an hour, and then took their departure.

"I hope, Mark, you like my friend, Miss Harrington?" said Ruth, as soon as they were gone.

"What do you wish me to like particularly in her," stammered Mark.

"In the first place, do you not think she is very handsome?"

"No, certainly not," he replied, quickly ; "I detest black hair."

"O Mark ! Why you used to tell me, your sister, who is so very beautiful, had quite black hair."

"Well, so she has ; but I dare say she would be much handsomer if her hair were brown, like—I mean, the colour I most admire."

"I am sure you are wrong, Mark," replied Ruth, gravely, and quite unconscious of Mark's

mounting emotions ; “ quite wrong. Nature always assorts the hair best ; even when it grows grey, people look much better than when they wear hideous false curls, or dye their hair : because the faded hair suits the faded complexion—I have often noticed this ; and so it is with the shades of colour—that which is, is best. I wish you admired Charlotte Harrington ; she is such a dear girl, and she has been so kind to me. But, surely, you like her brother ? Every body considers him handsome ; and he is so kind-hearted, and has such a splendid voice.”

“ I think him an insufferable puppy !” exclaimed Mark, with absolute bitterness.

“ O Mark ! I never heard you so severe. If I did not know better, I should say you were in a bad temper this morning.” As she spoke, she suddenly looked up, and read in Mark’s countenance something that made her own cheek crimson. She had been standing, and holding admiringly the beautiful bouquet in her hand ; now she sank into the nearest chair,

and threw the flowers, half-disdainfully, on the table. Presently, Mark took them up, and, examining them as if trying to make some botanical discovery, he exclaimed—

“What are you going to do with these fine flowers?”

“Whatever you like,” she replied.

“I should like to throw them in the fire.”

“That would be a pity,” said Ruth, archly, “when dear Mrs. Greyson so dotes on flowers—and we have nothing in the garden to compare with these.”

“Were you really going to take them to Mrs. Greyson?”

“Of course; but I should place them under a glass shade, so that the odour might not make her poor head worse.”

“Thoughtful Ruth! But must Mrs. Greyson have all?”

“Why not? Unless indeed you wish to carry in your button-hole a breath from the country into dirty, smoky London.”

“ May I ? ”

“ Certainly ; it is delightful to have anything — even a flower — to give ; pray choose.”

“ No ; choose for me, so that I may feel it is a gift.”

Ruth laughed as she took back the carefully-arranged bouquet, and, drawing out a brilliant blossom, presented it to her “ cousin.”

Somehow or other Mark retained the little hand which offered the flower. He had much to say — but he felt choking and could not utter a word.—

“ Mark ! ” murmured Ruth ; and as he released her hand, she sank back in the large chair in which she was seated. Mark was still standing, and by some instinct he moved to behind her chair. He could see that her cheek was flushed, and by the heaving of her chest beneath her high morning dress, that she was agitated and confused. This gave him comparative confidence ; had she been composed, he must have rushed out of the room.

“Ruth, darling Ruth,” he stammered out, “I cannot go back to London without knowing my fate—I should go mad with jealousy. Surely you know that I love you dearly—that I have not a dream of the future without you moving in it!” While he spoke he slid to a low stool on one side of her chair, and managed to make prisoner again of the white little hand.

“There—turn away your face if you like, but don’t draw back your hand—let me talk to you thus.—Ruth, I never spoke a word of love to any one else in my life—and I don’t know what lovers say, and should say—and I am sure since you have been here you must have had a great many admirers, and so perhaps I seem cold, and awkward, and stupid, but darling Ruth, no one loves you as I do;—and I want to know if *you* have ever imagined this hour,—if you have ever thought of yourself as my darling Wife?—No answer!—then you have—you have!” and now in a paroxysm of half tearful joy, Mark

kissed her sleeve, and even the little hand itself, "tell me" he continued—"tell me that you have pictured all this—you are no coquette, you never were, you never could be—tell me the truth, dearest, tell me that you can love me?"

Ruth slowly turned round her head, and Mark saw that the flushed cheeks were dewed with tears.

"I will tell you the truth," she exclaimed almost calmly; "why should I not? Dear Mark, I love you very dearly—and to know that you love me, seems happiness past endurance—but will your father consent that I should be your wife?"

"I will never ask you to marry me, until either he consent—or I have won the just right to choose for myself—we can wait," exclaimed Mark, in broken words.

"O twenty years!"

"Not a quarter so long, I hope."

"But Mark—I will not even be engaged till that time arrives."

“Proud, yet right-hearted girl!—but what does the form of engagement signify, if we love each other?”

“I mean a non-engagement that shall leave you free,” said Ruth, firmly.

“That is a coquette’s speech,” cried Mark.

“And,” continued Ruth, without heeding his last words, “and you must tell Mrs. Greyson what has passed. I would not hide it from her for the world.”

“Nor I. I will tell our best friends everything. Ah, there is a ring of the bell, and Mr. Greyson at the gate — he will be here in a minute. Ruth, give me one kiss—darling, but one! and I will never ask for another, till I have a right to claim it — a right, even according to your coquette’s notion—till we are formally betrothed. Dear Ruth, it is something to tell you, and O such a happiness to myself to know, that my kiss is as pure and unprofaned as your own!”

CHAP. XXVI.

A DEATH CHAMBER.

SURELY houses and neighbourhoods have their own expressive physiognomies, if we do but read them; and nowhere are they more distinctly marked than in London. The long line of bustling thoroughfare, with its two walls of gay and attractive shops, tells its tale of business and pleasure, of long toil and anxious competition, but yet maintains the well-to-do air, which generally accompanies activity. The city—that focus of metropolitan wealth, with its queer lanes, its quiet nooks, and its palace counting-houses — has less show, and though more absolute activity, less restless appearance of it, as becomes the dignity of its

degree. Then at the far west, are the aristocratic mansions of the noble and the wealthy, porticoed and double-doored ; standing back out of the noise and dust, with fairy-tale magnificence within, but no show of splendour glaring through any chance window—emblematic of conscious rights, and it may be pride, but not vanity. Removed from this district, there is a sort of pert respectability, which pushes itself on to the footpath, as if to show its damask window curtains, its or-molu, and looking-glasses to the passer-by, yet, for fancy's eye writes on the door-post, "worthy people who pay their way, I assure you." And there are the back streets, where honest poverty struggles to exist, and is lit and cheered by its own starlight ; and the haunts of woe, and the pandemoniums of crime!

One might fill pages with similar suggestions—but I will offer only one more. There is a neighbourhood lying between the Foundling Hospital, and the Gray's Inn Road, which

looks as if it were dead asleep ; and when I gaze up at that house in Mecklenburgh Square, where, in the year I write of, Julian Grieves lay dying, I can fancy the whole scene was a night-mare dream in the midst of an enchanted slumber.

Why this should be such a dreary spot, I never could clearly make out. The houses look good and commodious ones ; and the situation is all that is understood by the word centrical —the name is suggestive of George the Third's days, of loyalty and respectability ; and yet—and yet—why the very sparrows mope, and share the influence of the place. After all, it was quite the spot in which to play chess ; and it was here, that night after night Mr. Ridley had come to his old friend to enjoy their solemn taciturn game. It must be owned, however, that though chess had been the first bond of union between them, a strong sincere friendship—or liking—had grown from it. That sort of regard which was natural to spring up

between men of similar tastes, and age, the one a widower, the other a man whose home had long ceased to be dear to him—and both in those easy circumstances, which precluded the least probability of obligation on either side. Thus, whether they played chess or not, there were few days on which they did not meet. Mr. Ridley had sympathised deeply and truly with his old friend, on the hopeless condition of young Julian, and the opportunity of engaging Morris as his nurse, had been considered a very fortunate one.

As flowers spring forth to the May sunshine, so I think does comfort gleam out beneath feminine influence, aye, even in that sad scene, the sick-chamber. Without mother, wife, or sister, to sympathise or suggest, to think or arrange for him, Julian Grieves had been for many months a miserable, half-neglected invalid. True, his father's means were ample to pay doctors and servants, or to have sent him abroad, could he have been persuaded to try a

more genial climate; but there was no one about him with the clear eye of womanly affection to see the right, and fix his own wavering will. And so the time had passed on, till, suddenly, as it seemed, he dropped to the condition beyond human redemption — the condition when a long journey would have killed him. Physicians paid him daily visits; new servants—mere mercenary attendants—ministered to his absolute daily wants; and his father passed hours by his side, sighing, even weeping in his presence, and, from time to time, endeavouring to recall those religious impressions which, alas, in the hearts of both had been suffered to fade well nigh out of sight—endeavouring, but with that awkward, bashful manner, which is always observable in those with whom religion is rather an occasional necessity than an abiding influence.

The change that the thoughtful, experienced, tender-hearted Morris made in the house was very striking. In the first place, she had the

sunniest and most cheerful room appropriated for the invalid, and a little dressing-room, which communicated with it, fitted up for her own sleeping-chamber. The larger and well-ventilated room was kept, day and night, at an even temperature. Then the windows looked clear as crystal ; and the fire glowed and blazed in a well-burnished grate ; the curtains fell in sheltering folds ; clean linen seemed ever present and abundant ; medicines were kept out of sight ; there was a slight, but never overpowering, odour of eau-de-Cologne perceptible ; and, on one side of the fire-place, stood a large easy-chair, with a footstool near, and on the other, a roomy couch ; between the two, at the foot of the bed, was a table, with cooling drinks, fresh fruit—and the Book of Books beside them.

The young man had risen, at noon, from his bed, and now lay extended on the couch, in a loose wrapper, with a soft, light blanket and a thin white counterpane above him. The latter

looked almost like a shroud to its corpse, so wan and death-like was the countenance of Julian Grieves. The extreme hollowness of his cheeks gave a triangular form to the face, whose pallor was only relieved by the glassy bright eyes and a red spot on each cheek-bone.

"Sit down, dear nurse," said the sufferer, in a voice that, though slightly tremulous, was clear; "sit down, I am sure you must be tired. I called you up four times in the night, and you have scarcely rested all the morning."

"Never mind me," said Morris, gently; "you know I am used to be on my feet."

There was a short pause, which again the invalid broke. He had caught the eye of his nurse, and looking at her fixedly, and with a tear in his own, he exclaimed—

"How good women are!"

Something in the look, something in the words, or perhaps something in other looks and other words which she had noted the last few days, induced Morris to lean over the couch

and press the long, thin, talon-like hand of the speaker in her own, saying—

“Men always think so at a time like this; but I wish they did the same in the days of health, and youth, and pleasure-seeking.”

This speech shook the poor shattered frame of Julian Grieves to its very centre. He raised himself from the pillows which supported his head; he burst into a passion of tears; he bowed his face upon his knees: and finally as Morris attempted gentle assuaging consolations, he stretched his arms round her neck, and sobbed out his sorrow on her shoulder.

Poor Morris! Had she been iron-nerved to resist an outbreak like this, she never would have had to encounter it; for there is certainly some repellent power in hard stoical natures, which keeps at bay the confidences of the guilty, or the suffering. As it was, she wept from mere womanly sympathy with deep grief, the nature of which she partly

divined, by that rapid reasoning which we are apt to call intuition; but she lifted the dull dark hair from the forehead of the sufferer; she staunched his tears; she bathed his forehead; she brought him a restorative, and when something like composure was regained, her silence, and her stillness were only broken by a few kind gentle words which invited confidence.

“Yes,” murmured the sufferer, after a pause and nearly closing his eyes as he spoke, “yes it shall be told. Often and often have I lain looking at that little clock on the chimney piece, wondering with a curious interest, how many times it will have been wound, and where the hands will be, when the more strange machinery of this human frame shall stop beating; — then I have questioned myself, whether I must die with the secret untold— and without knowing any one by whom I could send a message to a poor creature whom —whom—I bitterly wronged.”

"You have betrayed some poor confiding girl!" said Morris, in a tone of deep pity—pity for both.

"Yes; it was long ago—when I was a gay thoughtless medical student—and my boon companion was Charlton Ridley. Nurse, I feel so strong just now—I shall be able to tell you the whole story, but first give me a glass of wine, you know I may take as much as I like. There—well—well—I must not inflict on you dreadful details. She was a mother; and I in my ignorance of a woman's heart, believed that she would be glad to be rid of her child. With the help of Charlton Ridley I had it conveyed to Paris, where it was admitted into the asylum for the *enfans trouvés*; and Mary was told that an accident had happened to it, and that it was dead. But for my cowardly dread of sharing her disgrace, I would have owned the truth, when I saw the raving agony its loss occasioned her;—and this was not all,

for circumstances appeared curiously against her; and to my horror she was accused of murder."

"But she did not suffer. O tell me, she did not suffer?" cried Morris, wringing her hands.

"No; for Charlton Ridley brought all his lawyer's knowledge and lawyer's logic to defend her. But the anguish — the open shame — through which she passed, seemed to change her whole nature. I had kept away from her at Charlton's entreaty, because he thought I was not to be trusted — that I should, in some way, let out the truth, and get myself compromised; and this cruel neglect, as she called it, stung her to the quick — her love — and it had been the first blind, passionate, self-sacrificing love of an ill-regulated heart and mind, died out like a spent taper — perhaps, even, it turned to hate. I did neglect — I did desert her — and all the time Ridley was acting to perfection the part of her pitying, disinterested friend, doing

anything and everything to prevent her learning a truth which would have exposed his share in the disgrace."

"There may be repentance for the worst deeds," said Morris pitifully.

"But, do I repent?—I do not know if mine is repentance, or only grief."

"And do you wish to see this wretched young creature?" asked Morris.

"Oh, no, no, no—it would kill me at once. Memory and imagination take such hold of my brain, that, to see her in this room, with her painted cheeks, and sin-won finery—for I know to what she has fallen—would madden, while it slew me. No, no," he continued, after a pause, and speaking in a lower tone, and more as if his words were self-communing, "No, no; I like to picture her in her cotton dress, and plain straw bonnet, and to think of her in her maiden bloom, with the fresh cheeks, and the clear eye, that was too frankly innocent to shrink from my glance. I

like to remember her shy, rustic manners before they had caught the boldness of the town—her merry laugh, and her slight provincial tongue ; because I see that was how God had made her—and it is I who have made her what she is. And you know, Morris," he continued, with a ghastly smile, "God's handiwork is fitter for a death-chamber, than the devil's."

"What can I do," sobbed Morris, "to ease your conscience, and reclaim her? Poor thing—poor thing!"

"Ah, there it is—you are a good woman ; you will not think the hem of your garment polluted, if it brushes against her—when it is all over, go to her, and tell her what I have told you, and say that remorse for what I had brought on her made me reckless—and reckless, riotous, intemperate living, brought me the road to the grave—but that I take up her sins to the throne of God, as well as my own ; and ask her to send up her forgiveness of me after them. I have nothing to leave her ; and

the hard world will not let her earn honest bread now: may God help her, poor injured, heart-broken Polly!" And the speaker writhed on his couch of suffering, and hid his face among the pillows.

"And Morris," he continued, after a little while, "when I am dead, and my father's heart is most softened, tell him this story, and ask him to rescue her from a life of guilt, and to save her from starvation. Good Morris, give me some more wine—my head is swimming, and I see nothing but the hands of the clock whirring faster and faster!"

CHAP. XXVII.

THE MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD.

MARK BOWRING sat in his little room at a table covered with books, papers, and letters. He had indeed, within the last few months, become a much more important personage than even, from his laughing speech at the Parsonage, his friends had quite understood was the case. So successful had he become as a lecturer, that there were more claims on his services than he could meet; and his acquaintance was sought by many influential persons, who recognised in him one of the rising men of the day. Yet perhaps he was his own severest censor; for his mind, strengthened by a certain right pride, was unwarped by a single particle of vanity, and he

was quite able calmly to measure his own merits, deserts, and success. He saw distinctly that his forte was oratory—as is ever the case when a fine intellectual nature is allied to great sensibility and the power of language. The passion of the moment coins golden words from the rough ingots of thought, and they bear with them a vital warmth from the speaker's heart, which affects the hearers as with a magnetic spell. Women of this order are the best conversers in the world, and exercise an influence in society that its members are often much too thoughtless to appreciate.

As Mark reflected how from a few rough notes, such as those he was now making—illegible to any other eye than his own—he was able to pour out a stream that was received as eloquence, if he might judge by the plaudits with which it was interrupted, he smiled to think how through all his boyhood to be a senator-orator had been his dream of ambition. Surely there had been an instinct which had

pointed out the work he had to do ! and to it he should yet be called ; that he felt and knew. Not, it seemed, as he had once thought, as the gentleman of easy independence — not as the heir of Stoneleigh ; though even that position would perhaps have been scorned for its insignificance by the Aristocrats of the land, or the Plutocrats of commerce. No, by the sweat of his own brain he would make himself heard, acknowledged, chosen ; and the name his beloved Ruth was to share, should yet ring in the world as that of a patriot and a statesman. True, the goal was far off, the portal to the course hardly open, the road untried ; but his present footing was so sure, every step he had made was such an advance, that it would be profanity not to trust in the future with a self-reliant hope. His love, now that it was spoken and acknowledged, was so happy and confiding, that it was no distracting passion to his mind, but rather like an enchanted island of rest, to which it retreated when the struggle of intel-

lectual exertion was over. He felt happy, he looked radiant that winter afternoon when Morris knocked at his door.

“ Ah, Mossy ! ” he exclaimed ; “ come in. No, you are not interrupting me ; I have just finished my morning’s work. It is an age since I saw you ; but I knew your sad occupation.”

“ It is all over ; ” replied Morris, with a sigh, and looking down at her black garments.

“ Yes,” said Mark ; “ I saw the announcement in the *Times* obituary, and knew that your care had been unavailing, and that your duties were over. Poor fellow, it was young to die—and so sad and so lingering a death.”

“ My duties are not over ; and my care—I think my care was not unavailing,” exclaimed Morris, bursting into tears, which she tried, but quite unsuccessfully, to restrain.

“ Dear Mossy,” continued Mark, taking her hand most tenderly ; “ what is it all about ? You were only with him for a fortnight—even

your tender heart could hardly have become attached to him in that time ; if it did, I shall be positively jealous. Why, if I were to die, this is just the way I should expect you to give way. Come, Mossy, tell your own boy all about it—what is it that makes you so unhappy ?”

“ I came,” sobbed Morris, “ on purpose to tell you ; for though it is a secret, my Mark must be trusted with it, and advise me what to do.”

And then, in broken, sorrowing speech, and with many sympathetic tears, Morris repeated the confession, and the entreaty of the dying Julian Grieves. And she added, “ Yesterday was the funeral. To-day, I was to leave the house, well paid for my services ; but I could not do this, without fulfilling my promise—without bearing the message of the dying to the wretched father.”

“ And how did he receive it ? ” asked Mark, in a tone of deep compassion, for his kind heart had been wrung at poor Nurse’s tragic recital.

“ At first, with a sort of half-angry disbelief ; but now he sits, like a stone image, with his hands upon his knees ; and all he says to me is, ‘ Find out the girl—find out the girl.’ ”

“ And this must be done immediately ; and I will go with you,” replied Mark, “ not that I would intrude myself into this poor creature’s presence, but I do not choose you to go on such a mission quite alone. I will be within, call —— ”

“ Kind Mark ! ”

“ Don’t you know I told you, the other day, I must take care of you now ; and so, Mossy, try to compose yourself for this painful business. I can be ready in three minutes ; and we will take the first cab we can see.”

And so they did ; but it was no easy task to find her whom they sought. With a strange, curious interest Julian Grieves had kept himself aware of the condition and residence of his victim up to the time of his confinement to the house ; but while he lay lingering, month after

month, and week after week, she had changed her abode twice or thrice. It was seven or eight o'clock in the evening, before Mark and his old nurse found the object of their search.

The sympathy, counsel, and companionship of Mark, had braced up Morris to the seeming composure which was so needful: a few words that piqued the curiosity of the wretched girl, sufficed to gain admittance for a stranger, and as the door closed behind Morris, Mark Bowring took up his station on the stair-way. As he stood on the smart staircase, and leaned against the gaily-papered wall, compassionate, prayerful thoughts filled his heart to overflowing; for, be it ever remarked that, pure-lived men—who are the only men that have real sympathy with, and a true knowledge of, Women—are ever the most pitiful to a fallen sister.

Ten minutes might have passed, when a wild, laughing shriek broke the silence which had prevailed, and the next moment Mark heard his

own name loudly called by Morris. At this bidding, he entered the room ; but no need is there to tell all he saw and heard there. The fierce fury of a passionate nature, when it sees the heights and the depths of its injuries—when it discovers, betrayal after betrayal, another, and yet another—and the whole lighted—kindled, as it were, by a lurid ray of hope, forms a picture rather to shudder at, than dwell upon. Nor can the bitter, horrible imprecations, that wretched creature heaped on Charlton Ridley, be repeated here ; but there were words — sentences — allusions escaped her, that wrote themselves on Mark Bowring's mind, as if they were interpreters — horrible ones, it might be—but still interpreters of that mysterious alienation from his father, which had been the great grief of his life. He asked for further explanations of these vague hints ; but absorbed in her own passion, or dwelling on some strange retribution, the wretched woman scarcely noticed his words. The truth was, the wild

revulsion of her feelings had brought her to the verge of insanity. Suddenly, at last, she snatched up a shawl and bonnet, which lay near, and rushed past her visitors, declaring she would find Charlton Ridley, and dog his steps, if it were till death, until he restored her child.

With something like the cunning attributed to lunatics, the Outcast controlled for awhile her raging passion, and so obtained admittance to Mr. Ridley's house in Russell Square. Charlton, it so happened, was at Stoneleigh, and Mrs. Ridley failed to expel the intruder, until her invalid husband had heard enough to feel convinced that his son was a villain.

CHAP. XXVIII.

A DISCLOSURE.

At last Lydia's marriage-day was fixed. Charlton had latterly grown impatient on the subject; and Mr. Bowring had consented to give away his daughter. Not that there would be much relinquishment of her society, for the pair were chiefly to reside at Stoneleigh. Mr. Bowring, as we have seen, was a confirmed invalid; and as the weather was severe, he was keeping his room, perhaps, however, less from necessity, than as a precaution against any increase of illness that might interfere with the solemnity of the next week; for though Lydia had stipulated for as quiet a wedding as possible,

there were certain festivities with which her father would not dispense.

She sat near one of the windows of the old library, and was busily engaged in examining, and at long intervals with most delicate stitches repairing, some slight ravages, which time had made in a very magnificent Brussels veil, that had belonged to her mother. Charlton was by her side, and some allusion of his to the occasion for which the veil was being prepared, had drawn a blush into her cheek, and made her look almost as beautiful as ever. Moreover, now that the appointed day was so near, and Mr. Bowring's Will made, and Lydia's marriage settlement drawn up, and everything in train to give Charlton Ridley the command of money, and induce oblivion of his duns, he had found it rather amusing to play the devoted lover; and so there had returned to her eyes that soft light of happiness which told of hope, and faith, and pleasant reveries. It is to be feared her thoughts rarely wandered to her absent brother.

Suddenly the avenue was darkened by some shabby hired vehicle, and the sound of rapidly approaching wheels was heard. Charlton was too indolent to move from the fireside, to observe the visitor; and Lydia only carelessly remarked, “I wonder who she can be?”

Presently a servant announced, that “a lady” desired to see Mr. Charlton Ridley.

“It must be some mistake,” exclaimed Charlton; “no lady can come here wanting me—perhaps it is one of your milliner or dress-maker people, Lydia—shall I go away?”

“Stay!” cried a voice that sent a tremor like ague through his frame, and paled his cheek to a livid hue. He looked up, and following close on the heels of the servant, was the wretched woman who had vowed to dog his steps until she had gained her object!

His first desperate thought was to deny all knowledge of her; but this wild attempt only infuriated her, and blackened his defence. She poured out alternately a torrent of imprecations,

and adjured him to give her the clue by which she could recover her child—and when he told her that he could not—a new stream of reproaches seemed let loose, and the story of the forged cheque became to Lydia quite clear!

Rarely have the guilty presence of mind. Had Charlton instantly decided either to draw away his visitor to another room, or lure Lydia to leave the library, this revelation might have been partially avoided. But he attempted both projects, yet neither vigorously enough to succeed. It must be owned too, that Lydia felt she had a right to listen; and yet once or twice she raised her hands to her ears, as if to shut out the horrid truths which were becoming apparent. Suddenly, when the awful wrong which had been inflicted on Mark burst upon her mind, she sank back in her chair with a faint flutter at her heart, and a swimming of her sight, as in a mist—but not a sound escaped her—then, in a few moments she rose, and groping her way like one half blind—half lame—touch-

ing at various pieces of furniture, as if for support, she quitted the old library.

There is no need literally to describe the scene which ensued between the wretched woman and Charlton Ridley. He tried to quiet her tongue even by brute force, and shook her, and grasped her by the wrists, so tightly that the nails almost started. After a while there seemed some revulsion in her feelings, for instead of violently reproaching him, she began piteously to entreat. "I have the money—the ten pounds you gave me still safe," she exclaimed—"I can journey to Paris, only tell me how to discover it."

"If I could I would not now," he retorted brutally; "now that you have betrayed all, and ruined me:—go—go—or you shall be driven out by force."

And so in the sleet and cold of December, in the bitter revulsion of despair, the Outcast was driven away—and beheld no more by Charlton Ridley!

It is not given to living man to know and comprehend the parting pang, either mental or corporeal, of the death-hour, and in like manner there are crises in life, death-moments of hope, which though seemingly not impossible to record, still mutely defy description. Yet those who have passed beneath the yoke of a hopeless irremediable grief, may know how darkly to fill up the broad outlines of Lydia Bowring's anguish.

Crawling rather than walking Lydia made her way into a near room — it was the chill fireless dining parlour. She would have retreated anywhere out of the sound of those two voices, — anywhere to be alone with her dread burthen. The revulsion was shockingly sudden; a few minutes ago she was beautiful, hopeful, happy — now her whole soul seemed turned inwards on one sharp point of agony, and yet there was a curious vigilance, of some of the most frivolous of the observing faculties, so that as she passed a large looking-glass

she saw that her pale face had assumed a rigidness which did not commonly belong to it; and she noticed there were exactly seven chairs planted in a row in the chill room, and finally found her gaze riveted on the portrait of her great grandmother, which hung over the chimney piece, till she began counting the turrets of curls in the bygone beauty's powdered hair. All these ridiculous observations printed themselves in her mind, and were henceforth to be for ever associated with this day of agony.

Then she sank down on to a footstool, and leaned her cheek against a chill leathern chair; even now she noticed the sleety rain, pattering against a window that was within her reach; but she took no count of time, and never knew how long she remained mute and motionless.

She was aroused by a step, and she perfectly knew whose. Had she looked up, she would have seen that the face of Charlton Ridley

was also set in a rigid mould of suffering, but she had not the power to lift her eyes. Presently he came near, uttered only the one word, her name, and stooped as if to raise her from the ground; but she flung away his arm with a gesture, part scorn, part sorrow, yet withal most firm and decided. Then he threw himself on the ground beside her, and forced his face beneath her gaze, so that she could not but see it, and as she did so, tears at length came to her relief. It was something that he had still the power to move her thus; but Charlton Ridley was not acting now; indeed he had not the least occasion to feign, for his fears and his distress were sufficiently real and earnest to defy exaggeration. From the near prospect of ease and independence, he saw that he was to be hurled to ignominy, defeat, want, danger, unless he could work upon Lydia's heart, and fan to life again the love his unworthiness had slain. He called to mind in rapid review, the times he had

found her like a reed in his hands, and yet these recollections gave him little hope, for never before had she had to forgive him a crime. Notwithstanding the yielding softness of nature which had made her a slave to her love, he well knew that Lydia was on points of integrity high-toned and true; and now to all his attempted explanations and extenuations, her reply through her assuaging tears was again and again—

“Charlton, we must part; and poor Mark must be righted.”

Like nearly all bad men, Charlton Ridley was part coward; but Lydia, alas! had small knowledge of the world, and did not clearly see the spring whence arose an abject humiliation that seemed like penitence. Not all his protestations could revive her extinct love; but something like pity rose from its ashes.

“It shall be confessed; I will meet the brand,” exclaimed Charlton, in all his craven humiliation; “all I ask for is time to prepare

for the blow. Do not turn me, like a strange snarling dog, from your door. By the memory of the past, I claim pity from you, Lydia Bowering. Suppose, just suppose this discovery had been made one week later!"

"Thank God—for —," but Lydia could not complete the sentence, a gurgling in her throat stayed her words; she could not thank God for plucking her thus from the goal to which her whole life had tended, much as her poor broken heart struggled to be grateful. A vision floated before her of what, a week hence, her duty might have been—not certainly to have continued the black wrong to her brother, but still to have clung to her husband through all his misery and his disgrace. Charlton saw his advantage; and, serpent-wise, improved it.

"Lydia, my lost Lydia," he exclaimed, and it was in a voice that wakened all the echoes of memory—"I beseech you to pause; by the past"—that fatal adjuration—"by the past—implore you, if but for a few hours, to pause,

and reflect what you do, by casting me away, hopeless and rudderless, to shame and despair. I say it would be possible to right your brother without inculpating me ; but, even if I must confess my wicked folly—my inexcusable fault —O Lydia, that it might have been as your husband ! O Lydia—adored Lydia—whom I never loved as I do at this hour that I am losing you—if you could but forgive this heavy offence—if you could still trust me for the future—if you would still dare to wed me—I swear to you I would then own the truth to your father, if you still insisted on it. I would—I would—I swear it. But, if I do so now, your father parts us for ever ; and think what it is to so discard me—think, if you, who might be my guardian angel for the future, now desert me—without hope—without love—think into what an abyss I shall be cast, and ask yourself, if you may not have to account for my future misdeeds ?”

O subtle — subtle argument, with which millions of bad men have gained their ends ere

now—and with which future millions will conquer, unless Woman is better taught to respect herself!—unless she learns to know that her soul—her life—is as divine, as noble, as separately rounded an inheritance as Man's, and as unworthy to be merged in, and sacrificed to, his existence—as his to hers!

Poor Lydia! Her frame seemed shattering with the conflict: possibly too the chill temperature did its part, for a half convulsive shivering fit seized her, and taking advantage of her helpless condition, Charlton Ridley carried her back to the library. And there he placed her on the sofa, and ministered to her with inexpressible tenderness, and there, for the first time in her life, Lydia, beheld him shed tears; and so—his pleadings were long, eloquent, even sincere, and finally, Lydia promised still to wed him receiving in exchange for this pledge, the oath that her brother should immediately afterwards be cleared and righted!

And all this while Mr. Bowring had been reclining in his far away chamber, amusing himself with the yesterday's Times, and a recent number of a sporting Magazine: and the several servants had gone about their duties, relieving the tedium of their employment, by a little village gossip, or the humming of a merry tune. Verily human existences are separate and distinct, and "only the heart knoweth its own bitterness!"

CHAP. XXIX.

THE INTENTION IS THE CRIME.

ONLY two hours since Lydia by an almost super-human effort, had calmed her demeanour sufficiently to visit her father, pleading merely a miserable head-ache, as the apology for her pale cheeks and trembling voice — only two hours since she left Charlton Ridley, pledged to present secresy of his guilt; but now he is pacing the old library, with the countenance and gesture of a maniac. The afternoon post is in, and it has brought him a letter from his father, in which he reads of the wretched Polly's visit to Russell Square, of Mr. Ridley's intention to see Mark Bowring that day, and of his determination to sift to the bottom

the woman's story of passing a cheque under an assumed name. It is a wrathful letter, revealing in its full force, the implacable "anger of a quiet man," brief but bitter, and gathering into one small hot focus, a host of reproaches and threats.

Charlton paces the library gnashing his teeth, and with his two hands convulsively clasped above his head. He sees at a glance the whole horrible future before him—disgrace, debt, penury—Lydia will yet be plucked from him—the remnant of her moderate fortune even will not be his—and herself? yes, at this moment when despised and deserted on all sides, her love, her utter devotion to him, shines out like some jewel which long hidden or obscured, seemed never duly estimated before. He really loved her now;—had he been rich and she been poor, he would have chosen her from out the world.

In all the future there seemed but one glimmer of hope—and this the faintest, mad-

dest—the thought that Mr. Bowring might die before the discovery could be made. Come disgrace then, he should still wield the magician's wand, Money—no law could set aside Mr. Bowring's Will; there was a handsome legacy to himself, only a yearly pittance to Mark, and all the rest to Lydia—and he, Charlton Ridley, was the sole executor.

Why did he live—why did he live? And Charlton, whose whole career had been the seal and sign of a prayerless existence, now prayed, deliberately prayed to God for the old man's instant death! Then his mood changed and deepened, and, without a thought of blood-guiltiness, he felt he could have strangled the old man with his hands. "Why will he live—why will he live?" he muttered again and again between his clinched teeth—nor noted, till she was near his side, that once Lydia had entered the room coming on some trivial errand from her father.

"Charlton—Charlton," she exclaimed in

horror, “what words are these—what do you mean?”

By a great effort he calmed his frenzy as he replied.

“Do you wonder that I am nearly mad to-day?—and now I have received a letter from my father, in which he tells me news of—of—one who has infamously betrayed me.”

She glided from the room. No lesser trouble than that of the morning could much affect her now; and yet, those words: “Why will he live—why will he live?” haunted her and mingled with her own nearer agony.

Half an hour afterwards from her father’s window she beheld Charlton on horseback riding in the direction of the next town. The weather had partially cleared, and she seemed to comprehend how the exercise might be a solace to him.

It was night;—a thorough winter’s night at bleak Stoneleigh. The snow, which had been

from time to time all day threatening to fall, came down at last in those fine, close, driving flakes which fill up the highways so quickly and so certainly ; and long after the house was closed in, a curious housemaid or philanthropic cook would peep out at the weather with a pitying sigh for the homeless on such a night.

How that dreadful day passed over, Lydia scarcely knew. It seemed one long — long period of endurance, through which a ringing voice seemed to chaunt : “Never — never was anguish like this !” And yet, there was only in the exterior of her manner that dead calmness which was accounted for by the “miserable headache.” Her father suspected nothing more. At dinner she minced the food upon her plate, and crumbled her bread to pass the time, but almost choked with the few morsels she attempted to swallow. Then she quickly returned to her father’s chamber, feeling that she was a shade more at peace there, until a sharp new pang arose in her heart, as she

recognised in all its enormity the deception she was going to practise towards that beloved parent. In the morning, when subdued by her own misery and that of Charlton, the fatal promise had been wrung from her, still to marry him, she had actually but faintly seen the cheat towards her father which this promise entailed. Her misery just now was of that order and degree, which shakes the balance of reason.

Still, to those who do not understand the outward calm of extreme wretchedness, it would have been surprising to see Lydia ministering to her father much as usual ; even reading some small-print paragraphs of the newspaper to him, though without receiving the least idea of what they were about. Both she and Charlton took tea in Mr. Bowring's chamber, but soon afterwards Charlton left the room, and, perhaps for the first time in her life, Lydia felt his absence to be a relief. Her father soon dozed, and for a long time she sat mute and motionless gazing on the fire, with the dog Sparkle resting on

a portion of her dress at her feet. Presently a servant with gentle tap brought in a little tray containing a cup of arrow-root, the invalid's nightly supper, and the medicine he was accustomed to take the last thing. Lydia noticed that the bottle was unwrapped, and that the coloured paper had been removed from the cork.

"Why did you unfold it?" she said to the girl, "you know papa is very particular, and likes the medicines to be brought up just as they come from the druggist."

"I did not do it, Miss," replied the servant; "I think Mr. Charlton must have taken off the paper — he said he was coming upstairs a little while ago, and would bring it, but he changed his mind when he saw me with the tray. Is there anything more, Miss, that you want?"

"No; do not sit up for me—I can do without you—I am not sleepy, and may remain up some time yet."

"Good night, Miss."

And still Mr. Bowring dozed; and though Lydia had lighted a candle, she sat watching the embers of the fire. Presently, Charlton Ridley entered, walking softly not to disturb the sleeper. She looked up, and did not fail to notice that he was deathly pale.

“Let me remain,” he said, in a low voice, “and give your father his arrow-root—I can re-warm it in the silver saucepan as nicely as you: I am sure you are worn out—go to bed, Lydia—dearest—and leave me to wait till he is inclined to settle for the night; and the medicine—I will not forget the medicine.”

“No,” replied Lydia; “I would rather sit up: you yet more than I require rest—go to bed—Sparkle will keep me company, for he always sleeps in his master’s room now. Go Charlton—it is best so.”

While she was speaking, she had—perhaps in absence of mind—taken up the bottle of medicine, and removed the cork. Now she was smelling it. Suddenly, Charlton snatched it

from her hand, exclaiming in a suppressed voice, "How can you, Lydia, be so foolish—inhaling all sorts of drugs, you know not what!"

"How can I!—why I very often taste the medicines before giving them; Papa is something like a spoilt child, and does not fancy them so disagreeable, I think, when I profess to like them."

"Lydia, promise never to do so again!"

"What nonsense!"

"But, Lydia, it makes me wretched, to think you tamper with yourself in this manner—do promise."

Some spasm of the old love came back, and made her yield to any demonstration of tenderness and regard from him: and so she promised. In a little while, at her repeated bidding, he said "Good night"; and then he stooped over her chair, and kissed her forehead. She neither resisted, nor returned his caress; but perhaps they both remembered how, only

the evening before, she had lifted her face to his, with a blush that told of love and faith, and with only a half-coyness.

And again she plunged into her anguished musings; yet after a while she withdrew to her own near chamber, and put on a loose wrapper, and let down her long hair in preparation for her night toilet. Then once more she returned to her father's chamber. Sparkle had trotted after her hither and thither, and now had jumped upon a chair, and was regarding very wistfully some sponge-cakes, which had been brought up as an accompaniment to the arrow-root.—It must have been nearly midnight, and feeling at last the exhaustion of her day of suffering, she was growing feverishly anxious for mere bodily rest. Yet she would not disturb her father; she knew he had suffered much lately from want of sleep, and she thought that this protracted slumber, might be an effort of nature to restore its balance.

A mind racked for hours, as hers had been, acquires a curious intensity in its perceptions, and its associations. Her hand wandered again to the medicine bottle, and she found herself, by a trick of habit removing the cork:—she had promised not to taste—a ridiculous promise, but still to be kept—but never not to smell.—Certainly the odour was a little different, from that she had so often inhaled—and holding the bottle before the candle, the mixture seemed to her undoubtedly paler. Had the druggist made a mistake? She would not give her father the medicine at all, he had already slept so many hours, the omission could be of little consequence.—But why had Charlton opened the bottle down stairs? And why had he snatched it from her hand, and why extorted that silly promise? Lydia leaned back in her chair, and closed her eyes, as an awful thought took possession of her brain:—and then, as if to fix it, there came the frightful echo of the words, “Why does he live—why

does he live"—which she had overheard in the morning.

The Thought which possessed her, was one too awful to make her faint or scream, or show itself in any spoken manner; but unless she were to go mad, it must be exorcised or confirmed on the moment. Very deliberately she took one of the cakes, which the dog had been eyeing, and completely saturated it with what she knew ought to be a sweet tasting medicine. Her hand only trembled and her lip quivered, when she lifted the loving little animal to her lap, and caressing it more fondly perhaps than ever—offered it the cake. The creature demurred for a moment, but obeyed her second bidding.—Not more than a few morsels were eaten, when the faithful dog gave a low sharp cry, and, after one or two quick convulsions, rolled dead at her feet.

Lydia Bowring, still silent, rose up to her full height, tossing back as she did so, some locks of hair which had fallen over her face.

There was exactly one thing left for her to do in the world, and it must be executed immediately. Taking a candle steadily in her hand, she left her father's room, crossed a corridor, and ascended a flight of stairs;—she was passing to what had been the children's nursery, but of latter years, had been fitted up as the bed-chamber of that habitual guest, Charlton Ridley.

No maiden modesty—no feminine reserve—the least controlled her; but she turned the handle of the door, and, with a quick step, entered the room. She just started, when she found Charlton had not retired to rest; he was crouching, rather than reclining, in a large chair. Her step had been so light, that she had burst on him quite unaware, and he quickly sprang to his feet, with an exclamation of surprise. A few hours before, her countenance had assumed a rigidity which was new to it; but now her features looked as if the hand of death had waved over them, and left a token of

its presence. No wonder that her appearance was appalling to the guilty man.

“ Lydia—for mercy’s sake, speak—what—what has happened —?”

No answer; only she looked at him fixedly and questioningly.

“ Speak—speak,” he continued, “ one would think there was Death in the house.”

“ Yes; there is death—as you expected. But with a difference. My dog gave no promise not to taste the poison you prepared:—Sparkle is dead.”

“ I—I—Lydia—what—what do you mean ? ” returned the guilty wretch.

“ Just what I say. And I come here to recommend you to leave the house, while you can:—my mind is a little wandering, and I can’t answer for what I may say before to-morrow morning. And, besides, there is a sort of satisfaction—a kind of atonement—in being the instrument of driving you from this house. Go—go—I will light you down the stairs.

This, you see, is instead of a bridal—and much better every way."

"Lydia—Lydia—you are mad—what can you mean?—let me go to your father,"—and he strove to pass her in his desperate attempt to act the innocent.

A light touch of her hand on his arm, nevertheless, detained him, as she replied, "I am not at all mad—and I know I shall not go mad yet:—yes, I see you are looking at your pistols over the mantel-piece—you can shoot me, if you like; but I do not see that it would do you any good. Cannot you understand that I come to you in great mercy? Pray go. No, you shall not take your pistols, you are not to be trusted with them—I say No;—but be quick, if my father wakes, he will be shocked to see poor Sparkle dead upon the hearth-rug. Go, sir, go."

Let us not be cruel in our condemnation, even of the most guilty. ONE who judges with purer knowledge than Man's alone can tell

the retributive agony to Charlton Ridley, of that hour of despair and humiliation. Lydia followed him down the old oak stairs, perfectly knowing he would never tread them again ; unbarred the massive fastenings of the hall-door with her slender fingers ; and then Charlton Ridley stepped out into the biting cold, and the falling snow of the December night !

Long before the dawn, the household were aroused by the furious ringing of Mr. Bowring's bell. Lydia was found in a stupor across the foot of his bed ; and the old man weeping and wringing his hands, and exclaiming, amid fond endearments to his insensible daughter, "Send for advice — the nearest doctor — and send to London, some of you, instantly, for my poor Mark — my dear, much-wronged son."

No one ever knew precisely what had passed that awful night between the Father and Daughter.

CHAP. XXX.

AND LAST.

THE hours which necessarily intervened before Mark's arrival at Stoneleigh were full of agonising excitement to Mr. Bowring; yet it seemed that his bodily strength rallied to meet the demands upon it. The physician, who had been called in to attend Lydia, looked grave, and though he declined to assert that her life was in danger, prepared her father to expect severe illness. She had been soon recovered from the dead faint into which she had fallen; but the moment of her restoration to her senses and to memory was so fraught with horror, that her mind reeled under its weight of agony, and

now no longer sustained by the necessity for action, succumbed—in the strange union of mind and body—to incipient brain-fever.

It was the turn of Mr. Bowring now to play the watcher, and as he sat by Lydia's bed-side holding her feverish hand in his, and noting how her head, in its unrest, tossed from side to side on the pillow, and how, from time to time, sobbing, moaning sighs escaped her; the silent quick-falling tears told how much he was moved. His darling, for whom he had planned and hoped so much, to be prostrate thus! And Charlton, whom he had loved and trusted, to have proved a villain! The blow was bitter, and all the harder to be endured, because it brought with it self-reproach. He had been cruel and unjust to his honest, true-hearted Mark, whom he had treated as an outcast, and believed to be criminal. But with most persons who have been the slaves of prejudices and narrow opinions, when these are once fairly uprooted, the tide of feeling sets in quite as

strongly in some opposite direction ; and thus Mr. Bowring's heart yearned with parental, yet penitent, fondness towards his long absent son, and a thousand generous intentions of atoning for the past crowded on his mind. Mark had not been expected before quite night, for Mr. Bowring was a little oblivious of the wonders to be worked by the electric telegraph ; but just as the December twilight was closing in, and a pale crescent moon sinking in the sky, as if to follow the winter sun, the carriage which had been left at the railway station, was driven rapidly up the avenue,—and Mr. Bowring by the aid of a stick and a servant's arm had only just made his way to the old library, when Mark sprang from the carriage and bounded up the steps.

His face was very pale, for he came direct from witnessing a terrible spectacle ; yet his step was firm and his mien collected, and as he entered the well-remembered room, there was something in his manly aspect that seemed

indicative of power and protection. The old man was standing near the fire-place leaning on his stick and Mark advanced towards him not boldly, and yet without timidity. Mr. Bowring held out his hand, and broke the silence by exclaiming: "Mark, I have wronged you—God bless you, Mark, and forgive your poor father."

"Dear, dear father," replied Mark in choking trembling tones, and supporting the feeble old man in his own strong arms. "Dear father, you have once again said, 'God bless you,' and I can now remember nothing more; to know that I am recalled to your presence atones for all else."

"Dear boy!" sobbed Mr. Bowring.

"I am come at your bidding," continued Mark, "less to talk of the past, than to comfort you in the present, and to ask you to rely on me for the future. And I, father, have something to tell you; but first I had better know what Charlton Ridley has done, and how far

my sister's illness is connected with the separation from him."

"Never again, Mark," exclaimed Mr. Bowering, with deep emotion ; "never after this day must his name be mentioned within these walls. I now know that for many years, he and his mother have deliberately undermined you in my regard—and that to crown his villany, he contrived to fix upon you the shame of a forgery he himself committed. I will show and explain all in good time ; and the Will I made while under his influence, was burned this morning. How he came to confess all this to Lydia, I have not yet clearly made out, for her relation of it was confused—and her heart seemed breaking, when in the middle of the night she came to my bedside, to tell it me. But incoherent as was the story, it brought conviction to my mind ; besides he would never have tamely left the house at her bidding, had not guilt made him a coward."

"Poor Lydia!" said Mark ; "though he was

unworthy of her love, she loved him dearly, and my heart bleeds for her."

"She is indeed ill," continued Mr. Bowring; "and I trembled for her mind at first. No wonder it was affected by such a shock. She even began raving about his wishing me dead—as I dare say he did—and then commenced some incoherent story about poor Sparkle, who died suddenly in her presence—and in the midst she seemed to gasp for words, and fell in a fainting fit across my bed."

Mark was silent for a minute or two, and then he said—holding his father's hand the while—"Suppose Charlton were to die—would it shock you very much?"

Mr. Bowring started in his chair, and looked at his son. "Mark, Mark!" he exclaimed, "what is it you have to tell?"

"That—that"—and Mark spoke solemnly and sorrowfully—"that he will wrong us no more. Three miles off, I met a crowd of people bearing a corpse on a plank towards the village

inn—a corpse taken from a deep gravel pit, into which it seemed agreed that the living man had by accident fallen. It was the body of Charlton Ridley. Father, I beseech you to forgive him—as I do—his offences, even as we hope to be forgiven ourselves in our own dread hour."

Mr. Bowring had fallen back in his chair while Mark was speaking ; now he drooped his face for a minute, hid it with his hands, and then said softly, yet quite audibly, "Amen!"

Three months have passed away ; and though marked as well by events as by emotion, the influence of this period on Mark and Lydia Bowring can be better traced in one broad view, than by a diary-like chronicle of daily circumstances. It was a day in early spring, such a one as we sometimes find borrowed by March from approaching May—perhaps to be paid surlily back with a winter's day in the

month of flowers ; but keenly enjoyable nevertheless. To break the links of painful association, according to Mark's suggestion, the library at Stoneleigh had been in a great measure re-furnished. At least, the curtains and carpet were new, and of different colours from the old ones, while books and pictures had been made to change places ; and even chairs and tables were differently arranged.

On a couch near one of the windows, Lydia was extended, dressed only in an invalid's wrapper, and nearly covered with a large shawl. A mere acquaintance would with difficulty have recognised the once beautiful girl, in the wan, attenuated woman she now appeared. During the fever, her dark hair had been cut short, and the few locks, which were visible beneath her muslin cap, were thickly streaked with white. Her complexion had lost all its radiance, and most probably for ever : her lips were pale, and her eyes comparatively without lustre, and yet, through all these evidences of

suffering, there was a calm expression of peace and resignation perceptible, that comforted a thoughtful beholder. A book was in her hand —her finger between the leaves—but she was not reading; she seemed looking out towards the budding shrubs, and listening to the pleasant caw of the building rooks. Presently, Mark entered the room, and drawing a chair to her side, commenced some cheerful subject of conversation. Lydia joined in it for a little while, and then said—

“ Dear Mark, I have several things to say to you, and may scarcely expect a better opportunity than this. Do not shun talking of the past to me—indeed,” and she pressed his hand in both of hers as she spoke—“ indeed, brother, it is a relief to me to talk to you.”

“ Dearest Lydia—if I can comfort—if I can console you !”

“ You can—you do; and chiefly, I think, because you thoroughly understand that, for such sufferings as mine, truth is the only mental

medicine. Now, tell me exactly how it was that dear old Morris came to be my nurse in the fever?"

"That was my doing," replied Mark; "I proposed that she should be sent for, thinking that her presence would call to mind the days of childhood, or, at any rate, could have no association with your recent anguish—and, knowing her faithful nature, I felt sure that, whatever in the delirium of fever you might reveal, would be buried in her own breast."

"Kind, thoughtful Mark! And her presence did comfort—did soothe me. Often, in my fitful, feverish slumbers, I dreamed of our childish days, and our play in the old nursery—and then I woke to the horrible consciousness of what that room had lately witnessed." And Lydia pressed her hands to her eyes, as if to shut out the terrible picture.

"Dear sister—why speak of these things?" asked Mark tenderly.

"I must; nor need you fear my want of

composure, it was only a passing spasm of recollection—and I shall conquer these weaknesses by and bye, I hope. O if you knew how much happier I am since you listened to my calm recital of the events of that dreadful day and night—separating the ravings of delirium from the yet more shocking facts—and broke the tale to my father, and brought him to my bedside to bless and forgive me my intended wrong to him—as you had already so generously forgiven my many wrongs to yourself—you would not doubt, that truth—truth to the minutest detail—is the only wholesome thing to offer me."

"I do not doubt it—I never doubted it—and ask what you will, my dear suffering sister, I will answer you truly."

"I wish to know what has become of the wretched woman, whose betrayal of *him* brought all the rest to pass."

"It is a tragic history, which I took some trouble to trace. It appears that she made

her way to Paris, in the vain attempt to discover her child. Foiled in this endeavour, she must have wandered about friendless and miserable for some days — none knowing the heights and depths of her misery and despair. Paris has its Bridge of Sighs, and its Drowning River as well as London — and a plunge in the Seine, and a bier in the Morgue, completed the tragedy.”

“What more? I have an instinct that there is something more to tell?”

“Part of an English newspaper was found in her pocket — and it contained the report of the inquest — on *him*. It was very clear to me, that his death had destroyed the last lingering hope of her ever finding a clue by which her desire could be fulfilled — and that her reason sank under the shock. O Lydia does not every link of this terrible chain remind us how one act of guilt leads on to another — if the final result of the first error, even the first folly could be seen, how many

would shrink back in horror and dismay. Even *he*, when he first began his career of selfish indulgence, license, loose companionship, and extravagance, never foresaw to what they would tempt him at last."

"You have not showed me the newspapers of that date," said Lydia, a tremor in her voice alone betraying her emotion; "it would be a satisfaction to know what was said at the inquest."

"It was called accidental death," returned Mark, imitating Lydia's seeming composure; "and the story ran, that he had imprudently set out walking before dawn in the morning, to take the early train — had mistaken the pathway in consequence of the snow drifts, and thus met with the fall which occasioned his death."

"And the real manner of his leaving the house is still unknown?" asked Lydia.

"It needs never to be known, save to those who now keep the secret — my Father, faithful Morris — and — and one other."

“Who else?”

“Dear Lydia, I have no secret in the world from Ruth.”

“Sweet Ruth — happy Mark!” exclaimed Lydia, half rising and looking affectionately at her brother.—

“Yes Lydia, I am happy; but in that happiness I shall never forget how much I owe to you. True that in the lavish return of his affection to me, my father acknowledged that I had a right to choose such a wife for myself; but your entreaty that she should be sent for, achieved what I should scarcely have dared to ask. And then your reception of her as a sister, and the opportunity she has had of winning my father’s heart! — Look now she is walking by the side of his chair in the garden, with her arm thrown over his shoulder — if we were given to jealousy——”

“Which I am not,” interrupted Lydia; “for I have found it very sweet to have so dear a sister. I remember your mother just well

enough to trace the likeness which endears her to my father so much. Now tell me, Mark, when are you to be married?"

"Soon, I hope—that I may give you a sister indeed; but you know Ruth is to return to the Parsonage, that I am to take my bride from her own 'home,' and that we are to offer up our vows in Mr. Greyson's little church."

"It is best so," said Lydia, "for many reasons. Mark, I have a present for your bride, but you must give it her, and under strange conditions. In the well of my work-table you will find a lace veil—too large and rich, I think, to be worn on ordinary occasions—but ask dear Ruth to accept it from me, to wear it at her wedding—only never to let me see it again—it would recall to mind all that I struggle day and night to banish. But see, they are coming in, and you must go and help papa up the steps."

Need it to be told—cannot it be guessed—that, with the return of Mr. Bowring's affection

for his son, and the fair, free opportunity of judging of his merits, came pride in him also ? Even the attention which the old man quickly found Mark's talents had attracted, was by no means without its weight ; and when morning after morning brought letters from persons of eminence with whom Mark was in correspondence, Mr. Bowring began to perceive and acknowledge that the party he had so despised and condemned, was not entirely made up of agitators and revolutionary democrats. He even indulged in speculations as to what sensation Mark would make in Parliament —confessed himself beaten in argument more than once—and generally summed up his concessions, by admitting that the world was very different now from what it had been in his younger days !

Nor is it necessary to describe the quiet wedding of Mark Bowring and Ruth Armitage. Mr. Greyson performed the ceremony, and Miss Harrington was bridesmaid, to whom Mark, in

the course of the morning, laughingly admitted his solitary fit of jealousy. It was but a short wedding tour they made, for, in his father's precarious state of health, Mark was anxious to return to Stoneleigh.

Mr. Bowring lingered still a few months, and died at last in his children's arms, blessing them with his latest breath. On opening his will, it was found that he had bequeathed to Lydia an ample independence ; but the estate of Stoneleigh, and some other property, descended to Mark.

However we may fancy ourselves prepared for a dear friend's or relative's decease, death always comes as a shock at last. It was many months before Mark and his wife felt the healing effect of time ; and to Lydia, her father's death was a life's grief to be added to her past bitter sorrows. They adopted the excellent restorative of a long tour on the continent ; and new scenes, fresh experiences, and all the novelties of travel, worked wonders. Even Lydia smiles

sometimes now, and on the whole, is less unhappy than might have been expected. Deep as the heart-anguish of her life has been, she is at least free from the dark influence which was perpetually deteriorating her character; free to permit and encourage all its naturally noble developments. Those who know her best, consider it impossible that she should ever marry; but she nevertheless leads a useful life. She resides with Mark, and occupies her time and her money, in unostentatious acts of charity. Of course Morris has a home under the same roof; and she is no mean assistant in many of Lydia's projects. There is a little three-years'-old Mark too, whom Morris declares the image of what his father was at that age, and a girl-pet his junior, to whom Lydia is godmother, and to whom she gave the name of Alice—"no, her own name should not be perpetuated" she said, when the parents proposed to call the infant after her; "no—but she would choose a name

for it at the font"—and she chose that of Mark's mother. It is a happiness for the parents—they being too generous for selfish envy—that the little Alice has attached herself to Lydia in the most wilful and demonstrative manner; and Lydia on her side dotes on the child with well nigh mother's love. It is a blessed boon that strong human child-affection, to twine its flowers about her poor shattered heart.

Mark has sold Stoneleigh, and very advantageously; though the house is to be razed, and the estate appropriated to manufacturing purposes. Best so; for it was associated with terrible recollections. No mortal dare pierce the future; but if one may hope trustingly in any human lot, a noble career is before Mark Bowring. He will probably be returned to the next parliament; and, improved by travel, by study, by extended intercourse with society, and with the sweet holy rest for his spirit, which only a pure love and a happy home can afford, we may reasonably expect to find in him

the disinterested patriot, and the enlightened statesman.

It would be a romantic addition to narrate the return of Ruth's father, with a fortune to lay at Mark's feet, in requital of a love tried by poverty and adversity; but the truth is, he has never been heard of at all, and poetical justice must give place to plain matter of fact.

Mr. and Mrs. Ridley were mercifully kept in ignorance of the awful crime which their son had contemplated. But the guilt which was revealed to them, was deep enough to make even the mother tremble, and almost reconcile her to the death of her only child: it broke the heart of the taciturn ailing old man, who lived only a few months; just long enough to replace the money which he ascertained Charlton had borrowed from Lydia, and to bequeath her a small legacy in terms of affection. He left little else behind him, for knowing his wife's own property was sufficient for her support, and believing her savings to be much

greater than they were, he did not think it any part of his duty to make further provision for her.

Mrs. Ridley is leading a wandering life, picking up new acquaintances at the boarding-houses which from time to time she makes her home. But at last she looks old ; and she is care-worn and miserable. Occasionally, though rarely, she writes to, and sees Lydia ; but there is little real regard between them : for the most part, only painful memories are disinterred at their meetings. Mrs. Ridley is a living example of lonely Old Age, when it has won for itself neither affection nor respect.

THE END.

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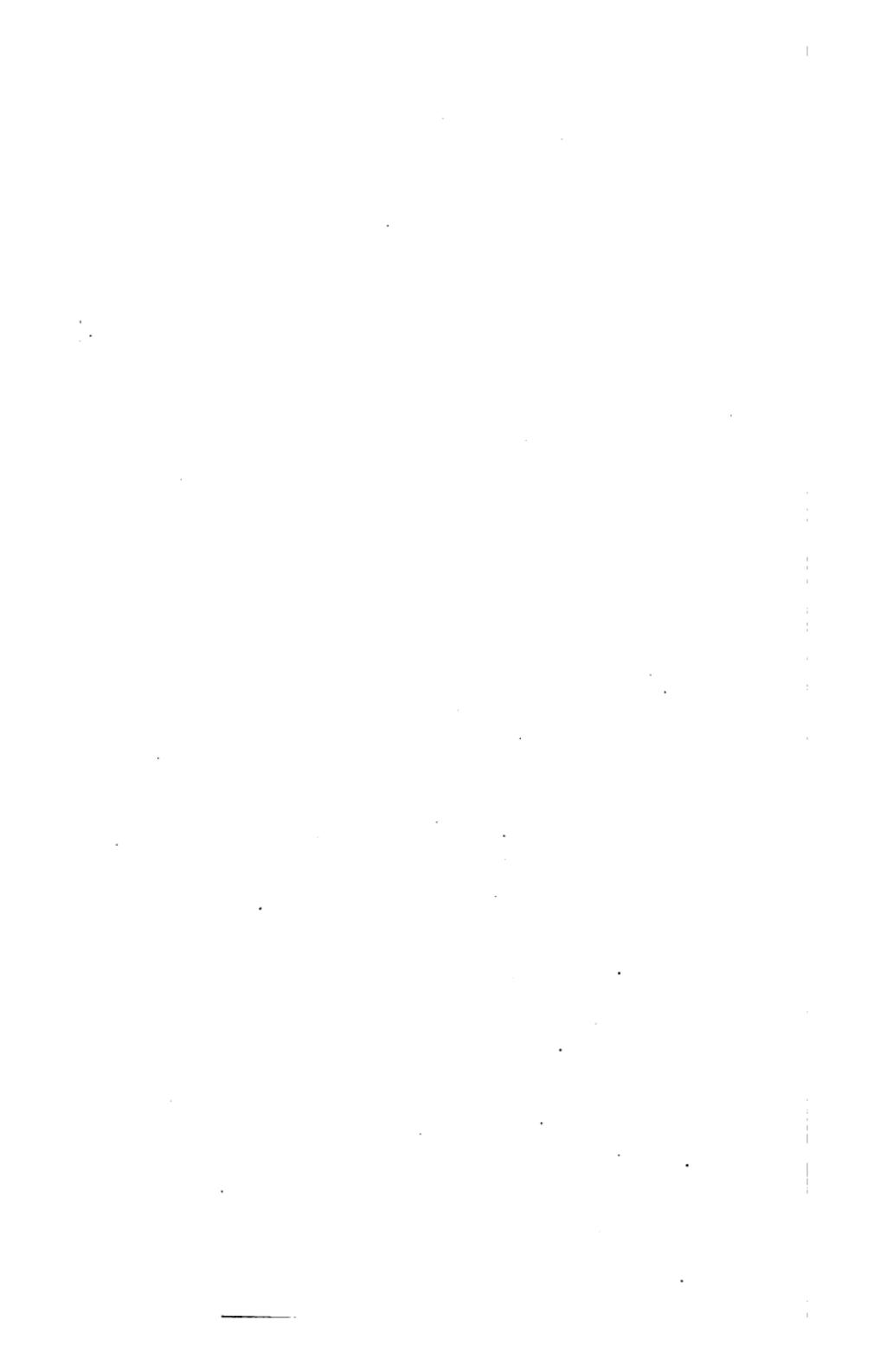
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